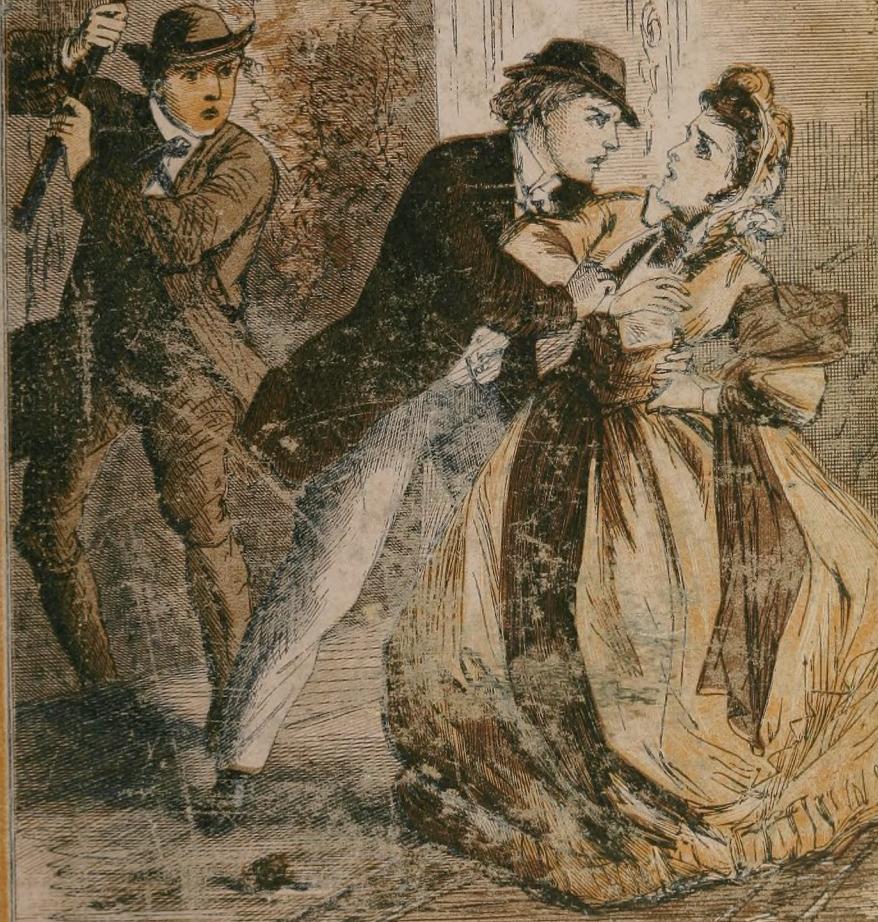


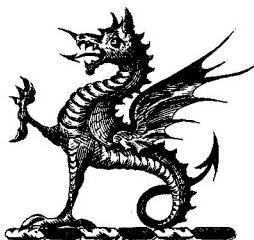


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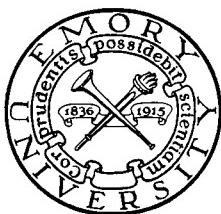
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BY

M R S. T R O L L O P E

AUTHOR OF

"WIDOW BARNABY," "ADVENTURES OF A CLEVER WOMAN,"  
"YOUNG HEIRESS."

LONDON:

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1864.



# MRS. MATHEWS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### JOURNALS AND NEWSPAPERS.

[Extract from the journal of Miss Mary King, of Weldon Grange,  
Hertfordshire.]

JULY 7TH, 1820.—I have this day completed my twenty-eighth year. Three years ago I well remember thinking that I had reached the extremest limit of young maidenism, and consequently that I had fairly entered upon the confines of old ditto. I well remember too, that the idea was a painful one, and that it made me sad despite all my efforts to prevent it. In proof thereof, there stands the entry in my journal, at page 372, three volumes back, wherein I say, “I feel miserable because I am so old ; and I am, and I ought to be, ashamed of myself for it.” Whereunto is added the pithy quotation of I know not whose words :

“ If trifles like these  
Your temper can tease,  
What signifies all your great sense ? ”

And this self-reproach, as I presume, did myself much good—for here I am, three years older, noting the same fact, aggravated by three additional years, without any feeling of sadness whatever. On the contrary, instead of fancying that my youth is past, I am quite conscious—too triumphantly conscious per-

haps, of being in the very highest prime and vigour of existence. When I was younger, I was less so.

If I were a preacher, with a female congregation sitting under me, as the elect call it, I would honestly do my best to impress upon them the folly, the danger, nay, the certain mischief of persuading themselves that their days of greatest power are their days of girlish youth.

This is a great mistake. In nine hundred and ninety cases out of a million, no female reaches her period of greatest power till she has passed her girlish bloom.

August 2nd, 1820.—The last twenty-five days of this, my faithful journal, are the most interesting of any of the events which I have as yet recorded—at least the perusal of them is the most interesting to me.

Why is this so, Mary King?

Perhaps my style improves as I advance in life. I am quite sure that my intellect does, *ergo* my manner of writing ought to improve also.

Will not this do by way of an explanation?

No, Mary King, it will not.

What will it do then?

The truth, Mary King, and the truth is that there is not a single page of the last twenty-five days' journal in which the name of John Anderson does not appear, and sometimes, I verily believe, half-a-dozen times over.

Of course, this clever discovery, together with this frank avowal of it, amounts to a memorandum that I have, on or before the 2nd August, 1820, fallen in love with John Anderson.

Is it really so? Is John Anderson my jo?

No, verily! Let me not lay that flattering unction to my soul. The young man is as guiltless of having made love to me, as is the babe unborn.

And how, Mary King, shall you like reading these pages of your journal some dozen years hence? Do you in your heart believe that there is any chance of your then being Mrs. John Anderson?

No, you do not.

And why?

Is it because you do not in your heart believe that John Anderson does not like you as much as you like him? Is that the reason?

No. It is not the reason; for in my heart of hearts I do believe that he likes me very nearly as much as I like him; bu

I believe also that he has most firmly resolved not to tell me so.

Here we have been, during the few last happy weeks, meeting each other at every house in the neighbourhood, walking together, dancing together, and oh ! for everlasting talking together, but never has he yet found an opportunity for hinting that he should like to have me for a wife.

Nevertheless, it certainly requires no very flattering self-delusion to make me perceive that every time he comes into a room where I am, his first object is to get near me.

If I were pretty, only tolerably pretty, I should think nothing of this—for I have for the last dozen years of my life, been very fully aware of the fact that not one young man in five hundred sees a pretty girl without showing in some way or other that he is inclined to take notice of her, and that there is not one in a thousand who does not make his desired avoidance of an ugly one rather more conspicuous still. And therefore it is that this constantly seeing and knowing that John Anderson seeks me in preference to all my pretty neighbours, leads me to think that he is as near to loving me as I am to loving him.

But though I am pretty sure of the fact, I am equally so that he has some excellent good reason for not confessing it to me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sept. 9th, 1820.—Both hopes and fears are all over now ! John Anderson has left Hertfordshire, and before the end of the next month he will have left England too, being about to establish himself in India.

It was only a few days before he left the country that I knew a word about his having any hope or intention of going to India ; but as soon as the thing was settled, he told me of it himself. He did not say a word however about loving me, yet still I do not believe that I was mistaken when I thought he liked me.

My opinion is that he did not think it right to say anything about love, because he was not rich enough to say anything about marriage. I heard our good clergyman say to Mrs. Johnstone that he was very glad to hear of Anderson's appointment, for he believed he had nothing else to depend upon, and that he was an excellent, good fellow. And I dare say he is an excellent, good fellow, and that his never having made love to me in words is a proof of it. It is my fault, I suppose, if the system did not answer quite so well as he intended it should.

However, I am not going to break my heart for John Anderson. You would not approve that species of devotion, Mary King.

\* \* \* \* \*

[Extract from the journal of Mr. John Anderson. "Prince William Henry,"  
Indiaman. At Sea.

Oct. 30th, 1820.—That page of my life's history is finished ! I am glad it records nothing worse. Yet it might have recorded something better. In the selfsame hour in which I perceived that Mary King took pleasure in listening to me, in that selfsame hour I ought to have turned away and sought her conversation no more. And I should have done so, I am sure I should have done so, had she been a pretty girl ; but she was not a pretty girl, and as I talked to her with a full persuasion that there was no danger of my falling in love with her, I thought there could be no danger of her falling in love with me. But feeling, as I now do, that I was most lamentably mistaken in my own case, I cannot help fearing that I may have been mistaken in hers also. And if so ?—why then I have left a thorn in the heart of Mary King.

I wish we had never met ! But there is little wisdom, and less piety in the wish, and she would be the first to say so. The time may come to both of us perhaps, when we shall each remember the other with more of pleasure than of pain. But had Mary King been a poor girl, instead of a rich one, I would not have left England without asking her to leave it with me.

\* \* \* \* \*

[Extract from a Madras newspaper.]

Married at Madras, on the 5th April, 1824, John Anderson, Esq., junior partner in the banking-house of Messrs. Moxley and Anderson, to Amy, daughter to Colonel Shirberg, of the Hon. E. I. Company's Service.



## CHAPTER II.

AND now, gentle reader, we start fair, for you know pretty nearly as much about the first thirty-two years of my heroine's

life, as I do myself; but I have known a good deal about her since, and as I think it possible that some of the adventures which subsequently befel her may amuse you, I will proceed to relate all the most remarkable circumstances concerning her which have come to my knowledge.

For the nine years which immediately followed the last entry which I have copied from her journal, nothing, however, occurred to her of much apparent importance, although it was probably during that time that her character formed itself, and acquired the degree of strong individuality which I have persuaded myself is sufficiently remarkable to be described with a fair chance of creating in others, something of the same interest which it has excited in me.

Mary King lost her mother while still too young to mourn for her. She would probably have been a very different person had this event occurred twenty years later; for this mother is said to have been a very clever, strong-minded woman, and the influence and companionship of such a parent would doubtless have been very beneficial to her daughter. For decidedly the chief defects in Mary King's character arose from her having been too much accustomed, almost from infancy indeed, to depend upon herself and her own resources upon all occasions which require judgment and decision, either for the regulation of her conduct or her opinions.

Her father had a multitude of good qualities, but firmness of character was not among them; moreover he was not only one of the weakest, but one of the most indolent of men, and had his intellect enabled him to imagine the most perfect system of education that it was possible for a motherless girl to receive, this indolence would have for ever prevented his bringing it into action.

So in fact, Mary King, as she often said herself, never received any education at all, save and except the being taught to read, write, and achieve sums in the three first rules of arithmetic; all of which she acquired with very tolerable success by means of a daily lesson of one hour long from the clerk of the parish.

But the said clerk, being an honest man as well as a good schoolmaster, very solemnly announced to her papa on the day that Miss Mary completed her twelfth year, that the young lady had got all out of him that he should ever be able to teach her; for that she could read, write, and cipher, quite as well as he could himself. Whereupon the good gentleman paid him

his last quarter's account ; and so ended the tuition of Mary King.

The daily lesson had certainly never been a very heavy task for the little girl, nevertheless she was very proud of the perfect independence which followed its dismissal. The house, considering who was the master of it, was singularly well stocked with books ; for the late Mrs. King was the only child of a somewhat bookish father, and having inherited the whole of his rather large and very miscellaneous library, lived just long enough, poor lady, to see it all conveniently deposited on shelves in a good-sized room up-stairs, which was singularly quiet and out of the way ; and of this room, Miss Mary took undisputed possession on the identical birthday whereon her education was declared complete.

Had it been the handsomest room in the house, her doting father would with equal facility have yielded the exclusive possession of it to her if she had asked for it ; but in that case it would scarcely have become so essentially her own,—for it is highly probable that the pleasure of looking at her, might have then so far conquered his indolence, as to have tempted him to walk from the breakfast-parlour to the room opposite ; but the effort necessary for conveying his person up thirty slight, narrow, crooked, twisting stairs, to the nest which his dear wife had lined, as he jocosely expressed it, with dead men's brains, was quite out of the question ; and it was therefore with a perfection of seclusion which many a professional book-worm might have envied, that Mary King passed the greater part of her life, from the early age of twelve years, in reading every book that she could get hold of.

Nor was her own the only library to which she had free access. At the cheap rate of being called “the oddest girl that ever lived,” she obtained the privilege of borrowing books wherever she could find them ; and from the time she completed her twenty-first year,—which important period was dignified by the increase of her allowance from twenty to fifty pounds per annum,—she not only indulged herself by the purchase of many precious volumes ; but, by means of subscribing to a London library, obtained the reading of many more.

It is probable that if a mouse were shut up with uninterrupted access to the very largest cheese that ever was made, its constant nibblings would in time produce a greater consumption of the article than would be considered possible

by any one who had not watched the marvellous result of ceaseless perseverance. And in like manner, the amount of Mary King's reading was considerably greater than any mere ordinary observer would conceive possible.

Nor was her memory at all inferior to her perseverance, either in vigour, or activity. What she read not only became her own, but was always ready for use ; a peculiarity which arose partly from a habit, as she went on, of referring to facts that had been laid up, and thoughts that had been generated by former study, and partly from the unmixed nature of her occupations.

In the case of Mary King and her father, as in many others, it was very evident that the marked dissimilarity of character between them was far from having any tendency to lessen their mutual affection ; on the contrary, it seemed only to increase it. The love of Mr. King for his daughter was that of a peculiarly helpless person for a being who seemed sent into the world for the express purpose of supplying all his wants and all his wishes ; and who, moreover, performed this filial task in a manner which made his dependence on her as much a pleasure to him as it was a necessity ; while on her side, her attachment to him was of that tenderest kind which a woman's heart is pretty sure to feel for one who loves, trusts, and is dependent upon her.

But this sort of dependence on one side, and support on the other, though there is much that is beautiful in the union it produces, cannot go on for years, without producing marked effects on the characters of both parties. The father could hardly fail to become too completely managed, or the daughter to become too completely managing ; but although a few harmless jokes upon the subject might occasionally pass among their neighbours, the affection between the manager and the managed was never weakened for a single instant by any consciousness on either side that their mode of going on together was not exactly what it ought to be. Nay, it may very reasonably be doubted whether they could have loved each other so devotedly, had any feature of their intercourse been changed.

The great defect of Mr. King's character was the indolence above alluded to, and which, from being partly constitutional and partly habitual, had so completely taken possession of him, as to render even the effort of forming an opinion for himself an intolerable bore, and he accordingly avoided it with as much

instinctive dislike as other men feel for a smoky chimney or a scolding wife.

The chief fault in his daughter's character was, as will readily be understood, of a very different quality. If he was too yielding, she was too tough. If he relied upon himself not at all, she, generally speaking, relied too much upon herself, and upon nobody else. Her own mind was so much the result of her own labour, that she had the same sort of confidence in it that a pains-taking workman might have in a tool of his own formation ; so that while the father rarely felt quite certain as to what he most wished to do, and never certain at all as to how it should be done, the daughter rarely knew what doubt, either in the one case or the other, could mean.

All this was no more than perfectly natural when their respective dispositions and the circumstances in which they were placed, are taken into consideration. The strange and puzzling part of the case is, that when the most important question of Mary King's life was to be decided, it was the father, and not the daughter, who decided it.

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### CHAPTER III.

JUST about the time that his daughter entered her fiftieth year, Mr. King began to confess to himself, though he confessed it to nobody else, that he felt as if he were beginning to grow old. He could still indeed walk stoutly for a mile or two without any other assistance than that of a stick ; could still eat a hearty dinner, and enjoy a glass or two of good old port after it ; yet, nevertheless, he had somehow or other got it into his head that he was not so young as he had been ; till at length having remained in this suspicious state of mind for nearly a twelvemonth, he at once, and rather suddenly, became convinced that he certainly was old, and, consequently, that it was highly probable that he should not live very long.

But although he but rarely forgot this, after he had once fully made up his mind to believe it, he carefully avoided mentioning the subject to his daughter, for he thought it would make her unhappy ; and he had the greatest possible dislike

to the idea of her being unhappy in any way. But although he did not talk about it, he never thought for long together about anything else; for the most anxious doubts and fears were perpetually tormenting him as to what would become of her and her money, when she should no longer have any man belonging to her.

This painfully-awakened anxiety had its origin in his strong conviction that men only were capable of taking care of the money concerns of a family, and of all the affairs in which this important medium of intercourse between human beings was the agent.

Mr. King, generally speaking, was not a man of strong convictions on any subject, and many people found it possible, and his daughter always perfectly easy, when she differed from him, to make him say (after he had taken the trouble of uttering two or three sentences in support of his own opinion), "Well, I don't doubt you are right. I have never given myself the trouble of thinking much about it."

But not so on the subject of money; and this difference probably arose from the great practical facility with which the value of the implement called money, becomes impressed upon the mind of all human beings who receive the breath of life in the lands where it is known.

Whatever was the cause, however, such was the fact; and Mr. King was as strongly convinced that men, and not women, should have the management of money, as any lawyer in the world could be—and that is saying a great deal.

This extreme anxiety on the subject was however, as far as Mary King was concerned, decidedly more masculine than reasonable; for it might have been difficult to find any individual of any sex, or of any age, or in any situation of life, more perfectly capable of taking efficient care of their own concerns than was Mary King at the time her father was thus grievously tormenting himself for fear of the ruin that might fall upon her when he was dead and gone.

Possessed of very robust and unfailing health, of a clear intellect, and fearless spirit, with much practical information, and much practical prudence, and with the considerable additional advantage of being the unquestioned, and unquestionable heir to a clear property of eight hundred per annum, her unhappy father nevertheless believed in his heart that his dear Mary would in all human probability be utterly ruined and penniless before he should have been six months in his grave.

The wild folly of these fears was the result of his weak head ; but the deep misery they occasioned him was produced by the warm affection of his heart. Never did he lay his head upon his pillow at night that he did not many times murmur to himself ere he closed his venerable eyes in sleep, “What is to become of Mary when I am dead ?” Nor when they were again opened to the light, did he ever fail to repeat the same melancholy soliloquy.

It happened upon a fine sunshiny morning when his daughter had placed him on a favourite bench in the flower-garden, before she herself retreated to her own more remote solitude, that a well-esteemed neighbour of long standing found him there, having been told by a servant that he was somewhere in the garden.

This neighbour of long standing was an elderly gentleman, some twenty years younger than himself ; that is to say that Mr. Mathews, the individual in question, had recently completed his sixty-second year. He was very well-looking and gentlemanlike in appearance, and enjoyed the esteem and good-will of all the neighbourhood ; and very deservedly too—for he was not only a well-to-do bachelor, who was always ready to dine out, and make himself agreeable, but moreover he not unfrequently gave very nice little dinners in return. His importance in the neighbourhood, however, was certainly not so great as it would have been had the pretty little mansion and grounds which he occupied been his own property. This, however, was not the case ; and the consequence was that he had no vote in the county—a circumstance which he often very deeply lamented in secret.

Having reached the sunny bench whereon his venerable neighbour was enjoying himself, with his hands crossed on the smooth top of his well-used walking-stick, and his eyes enjoying the bright light which enabled him to see clearly all the well-known and well-loved objects that surrounded him there, the usual friendly salutations being exchanged between them, Mr. Mathews placed himself by his side.

The visitor, as probably most other visitors would have done, immediately turned the conversation upon the beauty of the garden in which they were sitting, its lawn, its shrubbery, and its pretty view over the neighbouring pastures with their noble trees.

“Yes, Mr. Mathews,” replied the gratified proprietor, looking round with a well-pleased, yet half-melancholy smile on the

scene which was unchanged in its principal features since the days of his great-grandfather

"I do love the old place," said he, "chiefly, I suppose, for old acquaintance-sake—but a little, I think, for its own beauty too. I do not know any place in the country that I would exchange for it, small as it is."

"It is beautiful, Sir, quite beautiful, Mr. King," returned his neighbour, with equal earnestness and sincerity; "and then it is your own, my good Sir, and every shilling you lay out upon it is just so much money saved, instead of so much money spent. I have often thought, Mr. King, that the most foolish thing I ever did in my life was renting Oak Hill instead of buying it. I might have bought it when I took it first, you know; but just as I was beginning to think that I would propose to my landlord for the purchase, he died, and now it is the property of a young minor, whose guardian most positively refuses to meddle with it. So I must either make up my mind to leave it, or to remain a tenant instead of being a proprietor to the end of my days, perhaps."

"You have been unlucky, Mr. Mathews," replied the venerable owner of the pretty domain they were contemplating. "But I see no reason either why you should remain a tenant to the end of your days, if you would like to be a landlord better. I dare say, sir, that if you would look about you, you might find some place or other to be sold that you might like as well as the Oaks."

"Not in this neighbourhood, Mr. King. Not in this neighbourhood, Sir, for I have already been making inquiries, and there is nothing, positively nothing, that is not too far from Weldon to content me."

"Why no, Sir, I do not believe there is anything of the kind to be had very near Weldon," replied the other.

"And I should not like living at any great distance from it," was the rejoinder; "I have got to feel myself so comfortably at home among you all, that the going among new people would make me feel like a banished man. So I must learn to be contented as I am, I believe."

And then the conversation rambled on to other matters; and after a moderately long visit, Mr. Mathews took his departure, leaving the proprietor of Weldon Grange to his meditations.

As usual, these meditations fixed themselves upon his daughter and his ducats; but though the home was the same as heretofore, a new light had gleamed upon his imagination which

gave the old subject quite a new appearance. "Why should not his daughter marry as other men's daughters did? Why should she not marry Mr. Mathews?"

A very few moments after this idea first gleamed upon his brain, sufficed to convince Mr. King that such a marriage would be the very happiest thing that could occur for them all, and so strong was this conviction within him, so much stronger than most others upon which his mind had ever fixed itself, that he suddenly resolved to act upon it without running the risk of being made to give it up, by listening to anything that Mary might say to him against it.

"There are three things that she cannot contradict," said he to himself, in the most solemn soliloquy that he had perhaps ever held with his own mind. "Mr. Mathews would immediately come into possession of a house and estate of his own in the most beautiful part of his favourite village; Mary would have a husband that everybody in the parish must allow would be an excellent match for her, and I should be quite at peace and at leisure to prepare myself for passing from this world to a better, with the comfort of knowing that I shall not be leaving her alone in the world with the certainty of being cheated by everybody that comes near her!"

The heartfelt happiness inspired by these meditations was great indeed, and the only drawback to the perfection of his contentment was a feeling a little approaching to self-reproach because he had never thought of such a scheme before.

It was quite a pleasure to Mary King to watch the happy expression of her father's countenance as he sat down to dinner that day; it was long since she had seen him look so cheerful, and his voice when he spoke to her was as gay as his looks. But he did not leave her long in the agreeable persuasion that the cause of this was the feeling himself particularly comfortable and well in health; for no sooner had the servant placed the wine, and the strawberries, and the gooseberries, and the currants, on the table, and closed the door behind him, than he communicated to her the nature of the pleasant thoughts which had caused him to look so particularly well and happy.

"Do you know, Mary," he began,—"do you know, my dear, that I have got it into my head that I have let you remain single long enough, and that it is no more than right and proper that I should begin now to think a little about your getting married?"

Considering that this was the first time in her life that the

possibility of her being married had ever been seriously suggested to her by the voice of man, woman, or child, it might have been expected that this sudden opening of the subject by her father might have occasioned her a somewhat startling emotion. It might have been expected, perhaps, that she would have changed colour, or fixed her eyes upon her strawberries, instead of fixing them upon her father's face.

But nothing of the kind occurred. Had he told her that he had taken it into his head to have the lawn mowed on the morrow instead of the day after, according to the usual routine at that season, she would have both felt, and betrayed more emotion. As it was, she smiled as all affectionate daughters do smile when smilingly addressed by an aged father, and then said, upon perceiving that he looked as if he were expecting an answer to his little pleasantry, "Don't be in a hurry about it, papa. I am very well as I am, thank you."

Had her father been a younger, or more quick-sighted man, he might perhaps have suspected from her manner that his daughter really had no wish or intention to be married at all ; but as it was, no such disagreeable thoughts occurred to him ; he was on the contrary perfectly well satisfied with the answer, which he thought was very modest and proper ; and after nodding his head very approvingly for a minute or two, he wisely determined to say no more on the subject till he had opened his project to Mr. Mathews ; and having come to this very discreet resolution he proceeded to eat exactly as much fruit as his daughter thought it proper to prepare for him, accompanied as usual by three bumper glasses of wine. And then he settled himself to sleep ; while the bride elect, having equipped herself in the ever ready bonnet and shawl and taken possession of the last review, walked through the open window upon the lawn, and thence to the favourite bench which had been occupied an hour or two before by her father and her old acquaintance Mr. Mathews, during the conversation which was destined to have so great an influence on her future life.

## CHAPTER IV

IT will make a long preface somewhat shorter if the reader be told at once that Mr. Mathews, the tenant of the Oaks, listened with no unwilling ear to the gentle hints thrown out by Mr. King, the owner of Weldon Grange, concerning the possibility of a marriage by which the said tenant of the Oaks might become in process of time the owner of Weldon Grange himself.

But notwithstanding my wish to make this portion of my narrative as brief as possible, I must dilate a little upon my heroine's manner of receiving the proposal.

Being fully authorised by his intended son-in-law, Mr. King entered upon the subject with her without any circumlocution whatever, saying in a tone peculiarly clear and distinct,

"My dear Mary, our good friend and neighbour Mr. Mathews of the Oaks has commissioned me to ask you if you will permit him to call upon you for the purpose, my dear, of offering you his hand in marriage."

Mary King's eyebrows suddenly mounted nearly an inch towards the top of her forehead as she listened to this announcement; but after the silence of a few seconds she replied, "Don't let him come here, father, upon any such fool's errand. You may tell him, if you wish to be civil, that I never intend to marry anybody."

"And would not that be sending *me* upon a fool's errand, Mary?" returned the old gentleman, gaily. "That is what all young ladies say at first, you know, when they receive an offer of marriage. But everybody knows, my dear, that they do not mean what they say."

"But I am not a young lady, dear father. I shall be fifty years old my next birthday, and therefore you may very safely venture to believe that I do mean what I say,"—was her grave reply.

"But you would not wish me to believe you in earnest if you knew how very miserable it would make me, Mary!" he answered in a voice more childishly treble and tremulous than she had ever heard from him before.

The sudden change was as painful as it was obvious, and shocked her greatly

"My dearest father!" she said, "why should my telling you this make you look so miserable? Do you not know that I am much too happy and contented as I am for it to be possible that any change could appear pleasant to me? I love you, father, a great deal better than I could ever love Mr. Mathews, or anybody else. Why therefore should I leave you, in order to go to him?"

"There would be no occasion for you to leave me at all if you were to marry Mr. Mathews," rejoined the old man. "That is the beauty of it, Mary! If you will be a good daughter, and do as I would have you, and marry Mr. Mathews, he would come and live here with us; and when I am dead, he and you would keep on living here just the same as if I was alive,—and the thought of that would make me die comfortable."

"But why need I be married, at all, father, in order to continue living in your house?" she replied quietly, yet not without energy. "And if I must look forward to the misery of losing you in the course of years, why should I not look forward to remaining here after you are gone? The thinking over the days that are past will be my chief pleasure then, and I am quite sure that I shall not want any husband to refresh my memory."

"But you will want a husband to look after your concerns, Mary," rejoined the old man in accents of the deepest anxiety. "Who will be able and proper to sign the receipts for rent? Who will write to order in wine? Who will say when the drains of the home pastures ought to be looked to?—And oh! Mary! Mary! Who will sit at the side of the fire with you through the long winter evenings? Indeed, indeed you will break my heart, my dear child, if you go on to the last saying that you will not be married?"

Under any other circumstances Mary King would certainly have felt herself inclined to laugh at this fanciful remonstrance; but large tears were running down the cheeks of her old father, and all propensity to mirth was cured by the sight of them.

"My dear father!" she exclaimed with more of womanly softness than her voice usually expressed. "My dear father! Do not make yourself really unhappy about it, or you will make me too miserable to know what I ought to say, or what I ought to do.—I am afraid, father, that I should not know how to be a good wife. I am greatly afraid that I should never get to love

Mr. Mathews well enough to behave to him as I believe a good wife ought to do."

" You say you are not young, Mary," returned her father, making a violent effort to avoid sobbing as he spoke, " but the words you have just uttered are the words of a romantic baby girl, rather than those of a rational woman of your age. If what I have now said to you has really put marriage into your head for the first time, there may certainly be some excuse for your starting off so violently like a frightened colt, and I am willing to listen, my darling child, to all you have got to say. But if I am patient with you, Mary, you ought to be patient with me. Old as you think yourself, my dear, you know no more of the world than a little child. Your world, my poor girl, has been the parish of Weldon, or at the very most the county of Hertfordshire ; and except what you may have got out of your books, you know little or nothing about your fellow-creatures beyond what you have seen among your neighbours. Trust me, Mary, I know what I am talking about, and you do not. It is likely enough I should think, that when you have no longer got your old father to look after, and take care of you, you may like to see a little more of the world than you have done yet,—and there would be no reason at all that I know of, why you should not, if you would only make up your mind to marry Mr. Mathews. You could not have a more proper person, for he is quite a gentleman in every way "

" But is it not a rule, father, for people to be in love with one another, when they marry ?—And I am not the least bit in love with Mr. Mathews, papa," returned Mary, trying to look as grave as he did, poor gentleman, but greatly disposed to laugh too, at the idea of being in love with Mr. Mathews.

" You are making a joke, Mary, of what I say to you, and you ought not to do that when I feel as if my heart was breaking. Old as I am, Mary, my notion is that I am more like to die of sorrow at last, than of old age."

These words, together with the look and accent with which they were spoken were sad enough, but they were made ten times sadder by the tears that ran so copiously down the old man's cheeks as he uttered them.

Yet had Mary not been conscious that there was truth in this heavy accusation, and that she really had been very near laughing outright, when thinking of love and Mr. Mathews, neither the words, nor even the piteous tears which accompanied them, would have produced the effect upon her that they now did.

But as it was she felt completely overpowered and subdued, and this was a sensation equally new and insupportable to her. Without in any degree deserving in the abstract the idea of being a conceited person—for Mary King thought very lowly of her own powers of charming, or of attracting in any way the admiration or even the notice of her fellow-creatures, yet nevertheless she was very little accustomed (practically) to feel conscious that she was doing or saying anything that she herself disapproved. But at this moment a sudden pang at her heart brought with it the terrible conviction that she was acting wilfully and wickedly ; and in order to escape from this unwonted suffering she threw herself upon her knees before the poor sobbing old man, exclaiming, “ I was indeed jesting when I said *no*, my dearest father, to anything that you so earnestly wish and desire ; but I am quite in earnest now, when I tell you that I am quite ready to marry Mr. Mathews, if my doing so will make you feel happier.”

The only reply that the shaking and greatly agitated old man was capable of making to this was the blessing her, and kissing her again and again ; but no words which he could have uttered could have served so effectually and so solemnly to have ratified her promise, as did this eloquent inability to speak ; and Mary King left the room, a short time afterwards, as positively engaged to marry Mr. Mathews as if that respectable gentleman had received her plighted faith after long years of the tenderest courtship.

And yet the last time she had the honour of seeing him, she would have thought it quite as likely that she might have been, within the next fortnight, affianced to the Grand Turk as to him !



## CHAPTER V

HAVING, of course, received a suitable notification on the subject from his venerable neighbour, Mr. Mathews, on his side, of course, waited on Miss King precisely on the day, and at the hour that was indicated to him for that purpose.

But before I relate what passed at the interview which then

took place, I must follow my heroine up and down the “east walk,” as her favourite garden promenade was called, during a late hour of the evening of the important day on which, so very unexpectedly to herself, she had given her father permission to tell Mr. Mathews that she was willing to marry him.

The life of Mary King had had less of romance in it than the lives of most young ladies ; that class of persons being, for the most part, a good deal addicted to the species of fanciful imaginings which tend to make people distort the sober realities which surround them into something either more gratifying to their vanity, more exciting to their imagination, or more soothing to their affections, than the unadorned facts of their existence could furnish.

But of this decorative drapery of existence my heroine had never availed herself, in order to conceal the homely outline of her every-day life ; nor was it likely that she should do so now in the vain hope of persuading herself that this marriage, to which she had been so strangely beguiled into giving her consent, possessed any of the attractions which the great majority of affianced ladies are apt to predict for their future lives.

No ! no atom of romance mixed itself in her meditations as she paced up and down the old east walk, for the hour during which she was accustomed to leave her father for the enjoyment of his after-dinner nap.

She saw her position exactly as it was—and, such as it was, she did not like it. She did not like the idea of belonging to any man ; though, to say the truth, Mr. Mathews was very little, if at all, more disagreeable to her, in the character of an owner and master, than any other man would have been. She believed him, and very justly, to be of a good, quiet, easy, equable temper ; to be just, honest, and honourable in his dealings—and to be hardly at all more tiresome in his manner of talking, than the majority of her friends and acquaintance. But, notwithstanding that she allowed all this—and she was conscious that in doing so she allowed a great deal—she still exceedingly disliked the thoughts of being married to him ; and there was not, from first to last, a shadow of doubt upon her mind, upon either the sincerity, the strength, or the durability of this feeling.

Nevertheless, she never contemplated for a moment the possibility of avoiding what she so very heartily disliked. Nor did this fixedness of purpose arise solely from her own respect to her own pledged word—although that had its weight also. But,

again and again, she avowed to herself, with the most stedfast firmness, that, if the whole thing were to come over again, she should again act as she had done.

"Rather, far rather," said she, in heart-revealing soliloquy—"rather, far rather, would I submit to hear myself called Mrs. Mathews to the end of my days, and to listen, for some portion of every one of them, to the talk of Mr. Mathews, to the end of his, than I would doom myself to the misery of recalling that my poor old father's dying request was refused by me!"

And, as her heart uttered this, a tear, that to her was a very rare occurrence, made itself felt upon her cheek. She was not young lady-like enough to pull forth her pocket-handkerchief to remove it—but she shook her head to assist its fall to earth, and let the evening breeze do the rest. But before it was well dry upon her cheek her thoughts were withdrawn from the past, and rolling onward, if not gaily, at least comically to the future.

"After all," thought she, "there is, I believe, no very substantial reason for my making myself miserable about it. If worthy Mr. Mathews were really a perfect stranger to me, there might be some reasonable ground to fear that the shape and colour of my future existence might be affected in some manner or other by his being made my husband, and such a possibility would have been quite enough to justify my feeling uncomfortable. But what possible difference can it make to me whether worthy Mr. Mathews is in the house, or out of it? Am I afraid that he should clamber up my corkscrew stairs, in order to hold sweet converse with me and my books at the top of them? Poor dear well-behaved Mr. Mathews! I should deserve to be set upon the cutty stool, either before marriage or after it, if I could do him such foul wrong as to suspect him of it for a single moment! It will be a bore if he expects me either to talk much, or to listen much to him, during meals, or during any other intervals when we must be together. But it would be weakness to shrink from this, with a feeling of helpless cowardice. It would be weakness in anybody, but utter poltroonery in me—because I know in my heart, as distinctly as a stout mastiff does, that I have the power of taking care of myself, if I will only take the trouble to do it; and if Heaven gives me life and health, I will take the trouble. It will be a duty to him, too, as well as to myself. I don't believe that the mere operation of boring people can be a pleasure. Teasing people, now and then, may be; and I will let him tease me as much as he can, but I will NOT let him bore me."

This resolution seemed to have a powerful and very cheering effect upon the spirits of the bride elect. Her step became firmer and more elastic, and the expression of her small but bright dark eyes, as she raised her head and looked around her was anything rather than desponding.

Two o'clock, on the following day, brought Mr. Mathews to her presence. Notes had been exchanged to that effect between the two old gentlemen, and Mary King had received due notice from her father that it would be desirable she should find herself in the drawing-room at that hour.

Nothing under the circumstances could be in better taste and style than her manner of receiving him. She did not pretend to be reading—something approaching to a feeling of repugnance to the occupation prevented her from having recourse to it : but as she thought there would be something awkward in sitting up in all the state and dignity of perfect idleness, she had brought out her winter knitting-basket—the knitting of worsted hose being the only absolutely feminine occupation to which she ever had recourse ; and even this, under ordinary circumstances, was only brought forth during the long evenings of winter—when, with most praiseworthy filial devotion, she laid aside her book, as soon as her father awakened from his after-dinner nap, and amused him with all sorts of chit-chat about everything that she could think of.

Assuredly there was nothing either in her dress, manner, or features, which could have suggested, either to the wooer himself or to any one else, any idea of unsuitable disparity of age between them ; yet, nevertheless, Mr. Mathews was rather more than ten years her senior. But the dark hair of Mary King was already dappled with grey,—and her sober cap, dark silk gown, and close little habit-shirt, together with the primitive occupation of stocking-knitting, were by no means calculated to give her a juvenile appearance. On the contrary, it is not at all improbable that Mr. Mathews' first look at her, as his intended bride, might have put it into his head that she was too old-looking for him ; for he was by no means unconscious that he was a most particularly upright, handsome man for his age. But if any such unfavourable comparison suggested itself, the effect was more than counteracted by the aspect of the pretty drawing-room, which certainly looked particularly well on that occasion ; the bright summer light, partially softened by venetian blinds, and the well-kept flower-baskets in the windows, together with a peep at the well-shorn lawn without, and at the

noble trees in the rich pastures beyond it,—altogether produced an effect much more likely to give ardour to his suit, than her antiquated appearance was to chill it.

Of course the gentleman took the hand of the lady, for he would have done so in friendly greeting had his object in coming been merely to make a neighbourly morning call; but on this occasion he did not resign it quite so soon, leading her backwards as it were to the seat she had left; for, in the old-fashioned way, she had risen to meet him.

But, perceiving that he intended to continue in possession of her hand after she had reseated herself, as a sort of emblem perhaps of the nature of his errand, she said, in the most good-natured tone imaginable, “I beg your pardon, Mr. Mathews, but you must let me have my hand, please, or I shall have sad work with my knitting.”

“My dear Miss King!” he replied, “I beg your pardon ten thousand times for my awkwardness; but upon this particular occasion you must excuse me,—for do you not know that I am come hither this morning expressly to ask for the possession of that hand?”

“Yes, Mr. Mathews,” she replied, quietly restoring two or three dropped stitches to their place on the knitting-needle; “my father told me what you were coming to say.”

“And may I flatter myself, Miss King, that I do not find you averse to listen to me?” he rejoined.

Mary King had fully made up her mind to marry Mr. Mathews, although she would very much rather have remained a single woman, could she have done so without giving her father more pain than she had courage to inflict; and having so made up her mind, she was too sensible a woman to think it either necessary, right, or proper that she should tell him that she would not be his wife if she had nobody to consult but herself. Nevertheless, she thought it was due to him to be as nearly sincere on the subject as she could be, without impropriety; and she, therefore, looked very grave as she replied, “If I were really averse to listen to you, Mr. Mathews, I would not have let you have the trouble of calling here to-day. But though I am not averse to listen to you, I wish that you also should listen to me.” And here she paused for a moment; but Mr. Mathews occupied the interval by saying, with very polite energy, “Believe me, my dear Miss King, that there is nothing on earth I so much wish for as the pleasure of listening to you.”

"But I am not quite certain, Mr. Mathews, that you will like what I am going to say to you. I doubt if it is quite fair, Sir, that I should marry you without making you first acquainted with some peculiarities in my character, which it is too late for me to change, but which I think many gentlemen might object to. In the first place, Mr. Mathews, I ought to tell you that my dear, good father has been too indulgent to me ; he has quite spoiled me as to the article of passive obedience, which I am told most men expect from their wives. I am quite sure, Mr. Mathews, that I could not be passively obedient to any one."

"And I am quite sure, my dear lady, that I could never wish any one to be passively obedient to me," replied Mr. Mathews, —whose eyes, to avoid staring rudely in the face of the lady as she made him the above confession, had fixed itself, with much genuine admiration, on the pretty view disclosed by the half-open blinds. "I am quite sure, Miss King, that I should hate and despise passive obedience in anybody"

"So far, then, we are quite agreed," resumed Miss King. "But I have still another peculiarity to confess to you, Mr. Mathews. One especial feature of the life-long indulgence of which I have spoken, is my having been permitted, almost from childhood, to employ every hour precisely according to my own inclination. No engagements, either of pleasure or business, have ever been made for me from which I have not had unlimited power to withdraw myself, without any question asked, or reason given, save that I wished to be doing something else."

"Well!" said Mr. Mathews, smilingly, "I see nothing unreasonable in that. I should be unwilling to marry any lady who I supposed had not sufficient discretion to arrange her own engagements." On receiving this reply, Mary King bowed as if to acknowledge his obliging confidence in her discretion ; and then, after another short silence, she added, "All I have to say further, Mr. Mathews, is, that not being so young as ladies generally are when they marry, I shall wish to be made acquainted with the manner in which the property which we possess is to be settled. On this point I do not think I am likely to be unreasonable ; but I shall choose to feel myself independent of accidents."

If Mary King had soothed herself with any hopes that any of the conditions for which she had stipulated would frighten the gentleman from his purpose, she was disappointed, for the

interview concluded by his declaring that the admirable judgment and good sense which she had displayed in the course of it, had made him many thousand times more desirous than before of the honour and happiness of being her husband.

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## CHAPTER VI.

"So it's all settled, my darling!" said old Mr. King on meeting his daughter at the door of the dining-room as the clock in the hall struck five; "and it is years and years since I have been so happy as I am now, Mary," he added, as he took her arm to steady his steps as he entered the room.

She pressed his hand in reply, but she said nothing; probably because the man-servant who was waiting to shut the door after they had passed through it, was too near to permit her being confidential. And, for the same reason, but little passed between them while the dinner lasted, beyond the exchange of sundry pleasant nods and smiles on the part of the old gentleman, and the kindly reception of them on the part of his daughter.

But no sooner were they left to themselves than Mr. King filled two glasses to the brim with ruby-tinted wine, and having pushed one of them towards his daughter, gaily seized upon the other himself, and having raised it with a hand marvellously steady under the circumstances, he uttered in a voice that trembled more than his hand, "God bless thee, now and for ever, my dear child! you have made me a happy father ever since you were born, and not only have you made my life happy, but you have made my death happy too."

Mary too lifted the glass to her lips, saying, as she did so, "And God bless you, my dear father! It must have been an iron-hearted daughter who could have refused such a father anything he wished for so earnestly as you have seemed to wish for this marriage. And I hope it will turn out well for us all. The not having to leave the dear old house where I was born, is a very favourable feature in the business, father."

"To be sure it is, Mary. You do not suppose I would have let any one carry you away from it. No, my dear, not the best

man in the county should have done that, with my consent. But as it is, you see, it makes quite a different thing of it. Mr. Mathews, too, thinks a good deal of the place, I can tell you ; not having any landed property of his own makes that very natural, you know ; and as his money is safe and sound in the funds, and quite enough of it for comfort and to keep carriage-horses, as well as the handsome pair of nags he has now for himself and his groom, we may be very well contented too. For two incomes put together, my dear Mary, can always do more than if they were kept separate ; because there is one house instead of two, you know, and one set of servants, and one table. In short, my dear, as far as money goes, there can be no doubt whatever that you will both of you be better off, much better off. I can't say, Mary," continued the happy old gentleman, "that I am at all sorry at his having only rented the Oaks instead of having bought the place. The landed portion of the property being yours, of course, gives me the right to be a little particular about the settlements."

"Whatever you purpose to do, dear father, will, I am quite sure, be liberal and like a gentleman," she replied ; "and I myself should wish this to be so. Nevertheless, I should wish to consider myself as perfectly independent. You have always made me feel so completely hitherto that you and I were one and the same, that I have never yet known what it was to depend upon any one's whims and wishes but my own, and I should like, if possible, that this should continue for the future."

"It shall, my dear child, it shall," returned her father, with very zealous eagerness ; "and you have been very right to draw my attention particularly to it, for when people get to be as old as I am, they are very apt to be forgetful. But I shall not forget this now, Mary. Mr. Mathews is to come to me to-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock, on purpose to talk about money-matters," he continued, "and nothing shall be done with the lawyers, you may depend upon it, till you have been made to understand all about it, and signified your approval."

His daughter thanked him, kissed him, and then left him with the pleasant prospect of a particularly comfortable nap in his arm-chair, while she, as usual, took her way to the garden. But on this occasion she did not, as usual, take a book with her, for she felt that she had a great deal to think about.

In this case, as in most others, the truth of the adage, "*C'est le premier pas qui coutre*," was fully proved. Most certainly it

was not without a sharp pang that Mary King had made up her mind to be married ; but she was herself astonished to find how easily and how rapidly she was teaching herself to think of it with indifference. Though her common sense must have told her, had she permitted herself to listen to it, that her father could not live much longer, she amused herself by fancying that sundry little changes which would follow upon her marriage would be very agreeable to him. For instance, the having a close carriage always at his command, instead of his having it only when they dined out, would, she thought, be both healthy and amusing to him ; for he had for many years given up riding on horseback, and but seldom trusted himself in the little open carriage ; so that it was but rarely that he went beyond his own premises. Moreover, after very reasonably turning the matter over in her thoughts, she came to the conclusion, that however dull Mr. Mathews might appear to her, it was by no means impossible but that he might sometimes prove quite an agreeable companion to her father. She knew that her intended spouse was a great newspaper man, for everybody in the village quoted news from him and his "Morning Post" ; and as her father had left off shooting and fishing, it was by no means improbable that the having another old gentleman in the house who took in a newspaper, and was rather fond of reading it aloud, might prove highly useful to him.

And thus she went on plotting and planning schemes, by which her father's manner of life might be improved, till by the time that the bell summoned her to make tea, she was quite ready to allow that after all it was very possible that the dear old man was in the right when he took it into his head that the time was come when she ought to marry.

On the following morning the very unusual event of a knock at the back-room door summoned her to the breakfast-room a full half-hour before the coffee and the tea-urn were likely to appear.

"Well, Mary," exclaimed her father, as she entered ; "I have been thinking it all over, my dear, and this is what I think I shall propose about the settlements. He is to come here, you know, immediately after breakfast, and then, of course, you must leave us to ourselves, and that is the reason that I have called you down so early, in order that you might hear beforehand, and approve, as I hope, the proposals which I am going to offer to Mr. Mathews. The value of the property which I shall leave you, my dear Mary," resumed the old man, after he had made

her sit down beside him ; "the value of the whole property, including the house and all it contains, together with the twenty acres of paddock round it, which, as you know, is in the very highest condition, cannot be worth less, as our good lawyer assures me, than fourteen, or, it might be, fifteen hundred a-year. Mr. Mathews tells me that his annual income from the funds is rather above seven hundred a-year. Now this altogether will make you a very handsome income, my dear ; and as it so happens that you have neither of you any young relatives to whom it might be considered as a sort of duty to leave it—as there is nobody of this kind belonging to either of us, I think that the best and the handsomest way of settling the joint property will be by leaving it at the disposal of the survivor. I am aware, my dear, that this may appear like giving you an unfair advantage, because you are so many years younger than Mr Mathews ; but then, on the other hand, it must be remembered also that your portion of the property is very considerably the largest. So much so, indeed, my dear, that in addition to your having, from your age, the best chance of disposing of the whole of it, I shall not think it at all unreasonable, in conformity to what you were saying yesterday, to make the further condition that you shall have the annual sum of one hundred per annum for pin-money "

The only item in this statement which was not perfectly satisfactory to the heiress was the amount of pin-money. She knew, however, perfectly well, that Mr. Mathews was a dozen years older than herself, and she felt that this made the settlement proposed by her father so advantageous to her, as to render any attempt of hers to make it more so, exceedingly objectionable. Neither did she feel inclined so completely to transfer the management of the whole affair from her father's hands to her own, as she must do were she to avow her perfect indifference as to the destination of the property after her own death, and her strong inclination to have the power of disposing of rather more of it, according to her fancy, before that of her husband, than his plan would give her.

But Mary King, though often wilful, was never selfish. She remembered that she should never have consented to be married at all, but for the sake of pleasing her father, and that this very righteous purpose would be rendered abortive did she interfere in the arrangements for her interest which it was evident he was making with such supreme satisfaction.

A few moments given to such thoughts as these made her

decide upon agreeing to his proposals without expressing any objection of any kind, and the evident delight which her approval gave to the anxious-looking old man, was an ample reward for her doing so.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE weeks which immediately followed the arrangement of these preliminary matters were rather tedious and troublesome to the bride-elect, on account of the frequent visits which Mr. Mathews deemed it proper, under the circumstances, to make her.

It was perfectly natural, of course, that Mr. Mathews should have put his own interpretation upon Mr. King's proposal of a union which had certainly never occurred to himself till it had been thus suggested ; and his interpretation was *that the lady was violently in love with him.*

This solution was perfectly natural, for two reasons.

The first, and most important, was, that he truly believed himself to be still, if not the very handsomest, at least one of the very handsomest men in the British dominions.

The second reason arose from his consciousness that the lady's fortune was much more considerable than his own, and the inference was, that such being the case, nothing but an unconquerable passion for him, on her part, could have induced her father to have made the advances to him which he had done.

Under the influence of this persuasion, therefore, he naturally felt himself bound in honour to prove by every means in his power that her devoted and unconquerable love was not unrequited ; and visits, neither very short nor far between, was the most obvious mode of doing so.

But Miss King continued to manage better under the circumstances than most ladies could have done, for she very rarely remained in his presence for above ten minutes together, quietly assigning, as her reason for leaving him, that she was "busy upstairs ;"—a system of defence, by the way, which she adopted as much with a view to future as to present convenience.

Yet even these short interviews were a dreadful bore to her, from their frequency ; but she little guessed, good lady, the interpretation which the gentleman put upon the somewhat *brusque* manner in which she occasionally quitted him—she little guessed that Mr. Mathews was fully persuaded on these occasions the suddenness of her exits was caused by a modest maiden fear on her part that she might too openly betray her tenderness if she remained !

This very disagreeable period of her existence was, moreover, prolonged by an accidental legal difficulty respecting the title of a few fields which Mr. King had bought after the death of his father, and this accidental delay led eventually to a considerable change in the marriage settlements of his daughter.

It happened one morning that Mr. Mathews made his daily visit considerably earlier than usual, and it happened also, that instead of asking to see Miss King, he expressly desired to see her father ; whereupon he was immediately admitted to the morning parlour, where he found his future father-in-law very pleasantly engaged in looking out upon his beloved lawn, and occasionally indulging in a little conversation with the gardener, who was sweeping it.

“ I beg your pardon, my dear Sir, for breaking in upon you so early, but I have received a letter this morning that makes it desirable for me immediately to have a little conversation with you,” said Mr. Mathews, as with friendly familiarity he drew a chair to the window, and sat down beside him.

Mr. King assured him, very cordially, that he was at all times glad to see him, and then added, with friendly interest, “ And what is this letter, my dear sir ?—it brings you no unpleasant news, I hope ? ”

“ You must have patience to hear rather a long story before I can explain to you what the letter is,” replied Mr. Mathews, looking a little fluttered, and a little embarrassed.

“ Must I ? ” returned Mr. King, with an encouraging smile ; “ so I will, then.—Come, what is it ? ”

Mr. Mathews coughed a nervous little cough, blew his nose, and began as follows :

“ No man, I suppose, can have lived so long in the world as you have done, Mr. King, without knowing that young men will be young men when they are young.”

“ Yes, Sir, that is quite certain,” replied the other, in a tone of the most perfect conviction.

“ And the truth is, I believe, that I was not a bit better than

my neighbours, though I don't think that, upon the whole, I was any worse," returned his intended son-in-law

"I was but just twenty," he resumed, "when one evening, at Vauxhall, I made acquaintance with one of the most beautiful girls I ever saw in my life; and, to tell the truth, before that evening was over, I was over head and ears in love with her. But beautiful as she was, I saw at once, my dear Mr. King, that neither herself nor her party were in my own station in life, and I discovered afterwards that the man and woman with whom I met her were her uncle and aunt, and that they kept a small shop near Tottenham Court-road. But this had little or no effect upon me as an antidote to the girl's beauty, though of course it prevented my thinking of her as a wife. In short, Mr. King, I committed the folly and the sin of making her my mistress, and in due course of time she presented me with a son. Within a year after the birth of this child, however, she left me, taking the child with her, and informing me, by letter, that she was going to be married, and that if I would send her one hundred pounds she should never give me any further trouble, as the *gentleman* to whom she was going to unite herself was willing to adopt the child, and provide for it. She informed me also that she should leave England as soon as she had received from me the sum she had asked for. It was scarcely possible that I could have received more agreeable news, for she was a violent-tempered young woman, and I was heartily tired of her; but whatever her life may have been since we parted, I cannot burden my conscience by thinking that my acquaintance did her much injury, for I had every reason to believe that she was a very ill-disposed girl when I first met with her. I immediately forwarded to her the money she asked for, and from that day I have never had any further tidings of her, till the post of this morning brought me a letter from her, from Barbadoes."

"Indeed!" said Mr. King, "and does she mention any intention of returning from Barbadoes, sir?"

"By no means," replied Mr. Mathews, "on the contrary she tells me that she is living in a very beautiful country, and that she is extremely well off."

"And what has become of your son, Sir?" said Mr. King, in a voice that betokened some anxiety.

"I did my duty by him, Mr. King," was the reply; "I allowed one hundred pounds a year for his education and maintenance, and it was not from parsimony that I did not allow him more, but from sincerely thinking that it was enough, his

mother's situation in life being taken into consideration ; for, upon inquiry, I found that the *gentleman* to whom she had attached herself was a courier, making quite enough to maintain his wife, but not enough to place her in such a situation as to render it desirable for her to have more than a hundred a year in order to bring up her child in a style conformable with it."

"Was that hundred a year, Mr. Mathews, to be paid out of the income you told me you possessed ?" demanded Mr. King.

"No, Sir, it was not," replied the other, eagerly ; "a sum of money producing interest to that amount was placed by me in the hands of trustees, who have paid the income regularly into the hands of my son's mother, upon receiving a certificate from her certifying that he was still alive. I hope, Mr. King, that you do not really think me capable of so deceiving you ?"

"No, Mr. Mathews, I do not," replied his venerable neighbour, very cordially. "I should have been as much surprised as grieved to find it so. But it was proper that I should ask the question," he added gravely.

"Well, Sir, perhaps it was," replied the other, "and I am fortunately able to answer it satisfactorily. The child was chiefly brought up in Paris, I believe, for the courier was a Frenchman ; but I have never seen him, as his mother assured me that her happiness, and her respectability as a married woman, would be destroyed for ever, if I came forward as his father, for that her husband had adopted him on the express condition that no other father should ever claim him. I felt, Mr. King, that this condition was perfectly reasonable, and therefore I submitted to it."

"Well, Sir, I believe you were right," returned the future father-in-law approvingly, "and I presume that there is now no danger whatever of your ever having any farther trouble about him."

"About him, poor fellow !" replied the bachelor father with a sort of repentant sigh, "about him, I certainly can never have any more trouble, for the letter I have just received announces his death. But it announces likewise," added Mr. Mathews, "that I have a grandson, and a grandson already grown up ; my poor son having married at a very early age."

Mr. King was evidently listening with great interest for what was to follow, but he said nothing.

A moment of rather embarrassed silence on the part of Mr. Mathews likewise was at length broken by that gentleman

saying, with as much of resolute courage as it was in his nature to assume,—

“Such being the case, my good friend, I flatter myself that you will see nothing unreasonable in my wishing to retain the ultimate disposal of my property in my own hands ; subject, however, of course to your daughter’s enjoying the income of it for her natural life.”

Mr King’s head was still perfectly clear on all matters of finance, and he immediately perceived that this proposed change was injurious to the interests of his daughter ; for although the proposed alteration was, of course intended to give her also the power of bequeathing her own property, subject to Mr. Mathew’s life-interest in it, yet still the difference between them in age made it evident that the change would be more in his favour than in hers. And this the old man stated clearly and plainly.

“Yet, after all, my dear Sir,” returned Mr. Mathews, “this supposed loss on your daughter’s side is only a matter of chance. It is not impossible, you know, that I might survive her.”

“True, my good friend, quite true. But in all our worldly transactions we must submit ourselves to chances. All we can do is to seize upon such as appear most favourable,” was the very rational reply.

Poor Mr. Mathews felt a good deal disconcerted, but there was a passage or two in the letter which he had that morning received, which had inspired some new feelings and a little new-born courage also. Not that either the one or the other was of a nature to make him in any degree desirous of giving up the very certain and positive advantages which his projected marriage offered him ; so far from it, indeed, that it is probable this new-born courage would not have sufficed to make him venture to insist very pertinaciously with Mr. King upon the alteration he had proposed, had not the bright thought occurred to him, that he might find his betrothed more manageable than her father.

Confident in her tender attachment, and conscious also that he might successfully use an argument with her, which would not be likely to have any effect on her father ; he said, rising from his chair as he spoke,—

“Shall we agree, my dear Sir, to refer this question to your daughter ? Miss King is so very superior a woman, that I really think we should be wrong were we to decide any matter of importance without consulting her.”

" You are right there. Mary must not be treated like a child. You are quite right, Mathews. If you like it, you can send for her now, and invite her to take a walk in the garden with you," replied Mr. King.

The suggestion was immediately acted upon ; the lady obeyed the summons, and meeting her affianced spouse in the hall, consented to take a walk with him in the garden ; chiefly, perhaps, because she did not see any convenient way by which she could avoid it.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

It will not be necessary to trouble the reader with Mr. Mathews' repetition of the interesting tale concerning the follies of his early youth, which has been given in the last chapter. Let it suffice to say that the present version of it was given in the most delicate and refined manner possible. Of course he felt that a lady under the influence of such feelings towards himself as he attributed to Miss King could not listen to such a statement of his former attachment to another without vehement, and probably painful, emotion. He therefore, with very praiseworthy consideration for her, got over the ground as rapidly as possible, reserving the eloquence by which he hoped to obtain her consent to his proposal for the more recent and therefore less agitating portions of his narrative.

Having reached the death of his son he made a pause—a pathetic pause ; and it was in a tone of very tender melancholy that he resumed his little narrative.

" The letter which announces this death, this early death, to me," he said, " announces also a fact of which I have been hitherto ignorant—namely, the birth of my grandson. It is impossible, perhaps, under any circumstances, to hear of the existence of one so near to one without emotion ; but this emotion is greatly increased by the assurance, that this youth —this young grandson of mine, Miss King—is one of the handsomest and most highly-gifted young men that ever drew the breath of life ; and my correspondent says that he is so very strikingly like me, that no person at all interested about me could fail of being interested about him likewise. But of course

I should never think of permitting myself to feel any partiality towards him on that account ; on the contrary, indeed, I should think it my particular duty to guard myself against any such weakness. But this, however, has nothing to do, nothing whatever, I do assure you, with the subject upon which it is my wish, and that of your father, too, that you should be consulted. It is natural, of course, that the friends of this poor fatherless boy should be anxious that I should befriend him ; indeed, it is their duty to do all they can to obtain my notice and affection for him, poor fellow ; and were it not for the happy prospects which I am so fortunate as to have at this moment before me, I should certainly have thought it my duty to advise the poor boy to leave Barbadoes altogether, and to come to England. But as it is the case is different. The hundred per annum which I set aside for his poor father's maintenance from the time he was born, I shall think it right immediately to settle upon him ; and were I the solitary being I have been used to consider myself, I should do more ; but now I have no intention to do anything of the kind either during my own life or yours. But I confess, that if you will agree to it, I should gladly make such an alteration in our proposed settlement as should leave us both at liberty to dispose ultimately—that is,” he added, in a tone very deeply sentimental, “when we shall both have ceased to exist, each of us our separate fortune, according to our individual wish.”

There was something in the whole of this queer confession and queer history which gave my ill-behaved heroine a very strong inclination to laugh ; and it is extremely probable that she might have replied to it in anything rather than in a properly grave and business-like manner, if a sudden thought had not happened to strike her, which suggested the possibility of turning the request now made to her to very good account.

The good chance which her age gave her of survivorship, had, as we know, been already pointed out to her, and she was perfectly aware of it ; nevertheless she was very far in her heart from being quite contented with the proposed settlement. When she had told her father that she wished her fortune to be so settled as to make her feel herself independent during the life of her husband, she was far from expecting that the result of this request would be one hundred a-year for pin-money. It was not *pin*-money she wanted, good lady—it was *book*-money ; for it was here, and here only, that she had ever felt herself re-

stricted ; and it was here, and here only, that she had ever wished for the power of being expensive in her purchases.

Her worthy father, who had allowed her fifty pounds annually for her private expenses, really and truly thought that he was going to the utmost limit of propriety, when, in order to indulge the wishes of his darling, he proposed that the double of that sum should be settled upon her ; and this had been so evident to her that she preferred the letting it be so arranged, to the betraying anything like discontent at what he had proposed.

But the present occasion was so admirable an opportunity for obtaining all she wished, with no other imputation left upon her than that of preferring the power of spending money herself to that of bestowing it upon some unknown individual after her death, that she instantly determined upon profiting by it ; and she subsequently did so in a way that perfectly delighted Mr. Mathews, and which at last only caused her father to smile and shake his head at what he called her feminine eagerness to enjoy the pleasure of having one bird in her hand, instead of the prospective advantage of two in the bush.

"Let me speak to you and my father together on the subject," was her immediate reply to Mr. Mathews ; "I have a whim of my own about it," she added, "and if you will let me have my own way, I think we shall all be pleased in the end."

"I have no doubt of it, my dear Miss King," said the politely-acquiescent lover, without ever venturing to inquire what her project might be. "Let us seek your father at once, shall we ? and when this point is once settled, we shall all feel comfortable, I am sure."

"Miss Mary has a proposal of her own to make to you, Mr. King," said the rather anxious Mr. Mathews, as he preceded the lady into the parlour. "What it is," he added, "I don't know at all better than you do, and as she wished to explain it to us both together, of course I did not ask her." He then very gallantly handed her to a chair, and stood waiting beside her, hat in hand, to learn what her pleasure might be.

It was not very often that my heroine felt herself embarrassed when she had anything to communicate, either to her father, or to any one else ; but on this occasion she felt a sort of consciousness that what she was going to ask for was rather extortionate and exacting, and this made her pause for half a moment before she spoke, though both her auditors were evidently waiting with impatience to hear her will and pleasure.

But luckily for her dignity and self-acquittal, she recollectcd

that although what she was going to ask for was of enormously important advantage to herself, it was her purpose to offer in return what most other people would consider as more than an equivalent ; she therefore took courage, and said with the air of a person in no way ashamed of what she was about to utter,

“ You both of you know exactly how things stand, and therefore I need not recapitulate anything. It is obvious that Mr. Mathews has very much stronger reasons than it is possible I ever can have for feeling interest, and even anxiety, as to the disposal of our joint property after the death of both. Now, I honestly confess, that I do not care the least in the world about it. I would refuse my consent to any settlement which should leave either of us, after the death of the other, with a smaller income in consequence of that event ; but this contingency being provided against, I confess that I do not, and cannot feel any great anxiety as to what becomes of the property afterwards. But—I hope you will neither of you think me very unreasonable, or at least that you will be indulgent to me, if you do—the fact is that my happiness will very much depend upon my having the entire and independent control over such an annual income during my life, as may enable me to indulge myself more freely in the purchase of books than I have ever yet been able to do.”

“ In the purchase of books, my dearest child ! ” said her father, looking as if he really thought she was not quite in her right mind. “ What can you want of more books than it is in your power to get already ? Why, is not everybody in the whole neighbourhood only too proud and happy to lend you every book they have ? ”

“ My dear Sir,” said Mr. Mathews, laying his hand in gentle remonstrance upon the arm of his future father-in-law, “ we may both of us be quite sure that Miss King is perfectly incapable of proposing anything unreasonable ; and that she is perfectly correct as to my feeling on account of my grandson a greater interest than she does in the ultimate disposition of the property. This being the case, you know, the only possible way of settling matters in a manner to suit us both, is by her having her wish for a liberal separate allowance for what is commonly called pin-money. I am perfectly well disposed to do this, I assure you, and I most sincerely hope that you will not object to it.”

“ You may be very sure,” said Mr. King, gravely, “ that I shall object to nothing which you and my daughter agree in

wishing for. Speak freely, my dear Mary," he continued, turning towards her with great gentleness. "Let us hear exactly what it is you do wish. I am quite sure it can be nothing very unreasonable."

"I know that it would be unreasonable," replied the ambitious book-worm, colouring,—"I know it would be very unreasonable, were I not able and most willing to prevent its being so, by giving up in return what certainly can never be useful to me, but what it is now evident may be very useful to Mr. Mathews. I am not only willing to let him retain, by settlement, the right of ultimately disposing—that is after my death—of his own fortune, but of mine also, upon condition—"

But before she could name this condition, her father stopped her, by exclaiming, "How can you talk such nonsense, my dear Mary? I certainly cannot give my consent to anything of the sort."

"Then I must submit, Sir," she replied very gently, but looking most completely discomfited.

This look was more than poor Mr. King could stand, and he immediately added, "Of course, my dear, I don't really mean that I will not consent to anything and everything that you seriously wish. But it seems difficult to believe that you are really in earnest."

"Perhaps when I name the amount of the annual sum over which I desire to have the *immediate control*," replied his daughter, "you may find it difficult to believe that I could be so unreasonable the other way, and let me assure you both, that I should be of the same opinion, were I not fully aware of the value of what I am willing to pay for it. But the plain truth is that it is a matter of perfect indifference to me what becomes of Mr. Mathews' property or mine either, after I am dead; whereas I must own that my enjoyment of life would be very greatly increased if I might be permitted to have the uncontrolled disposal of five hundred a year from the day of my marriage, till such time as, in the course of nature I may expect to have the disposal of more."

My heroine was quite right in her guess that both the old gentlemen would feel a good deal of astonishment, and a little dismay at the amount of her demand, for the countenance of each very eloquently expressed both; and moreover it appeared that they were both struck dumb by it, for an interval of perfect silence followed.

Miss King looked from one to the other and laughed.

"I knew you would be both of you startled by the amount of my demand," she said, "nor should I have made it so high, were I not fully aware of the value of what I resign; and this value, in a marketable point of view, observe, is not at all lessened by the fact that, unless I were to dispose of it to some speculating Israelite, its value would be no value to me. Fortunately for my wishes, however, the case is widely different with respect to Mr. Mathews. A young man stands in the near relation of grandson to him, who is stated to be in every way worthy of his affection, and for the sake of securing the power of ultimately providing for him, I can conceive it to be very probable that he may be willing to allow me the independent privilege I ask for."

"But what on earth can you want to have five hundred a year pocket-money for, my dearest Mary?" demanded her father, looking in her face with an expression that spoke both astonishment and curiosity. "You will never spend it, my poor dear child!" he added, dolorously shaking his head; "and then you will find too late, that you have given up a substance for a shadow."

"Not a shadow, Mr. King,—not a shadow; five hundred per annum is not a shadow!" said Mr. Mathews, rather eagerly

"No, Mr. Mathews, it certainly is not," said the lady. "Did I not feel the truth of your observation I certainly should not make such a proposal as I have done."

"No, no, that is quite true, to be sure," said the reasonable Mr. King. "It certainly is a very large portion of income to give up, Mary. But must it be quite a secret, my dear, what it is you really want to do with it?"

"No, my dear father, not at all. I wish to have the independent command of this sum chiefly—I believe I might truly say, entirely, for the purpose of buying books, and maps, but it might serve me now and then perhaps, to pay the expenses of a journey," was the reply of Miss King.

"Books and maps! God bless my soul! That does seem very extraordinary to be sure," returned her father, certainly looking rather embarrassed, and as if he did not quite like to look his future son-in-law in the face.

Mr. Mathews was quite aware of his advantage; he saw plainly that the reasonable and well-ordered mind of Mr. King had made him instantly as conscious as he was himself of the wild absurdity of Miss Mary's notions on the article of pin-money; but he was too anxious to obtain the object he had in

view to let either the father or daughter perceive how very ridiculous he thought her proposal, his only wish, on the contrary, was to give it a sufficient degree of plausibility in the old gentleman's eyes to induce him to consent to the terms proposed.

The idea of founding a family in the county, which family he was already fully determined should ultimately take his own name ; and the prospect of having a grandson to introduce, so very handsome, and so very like himself, as the description of this interesting young stranger gave him every reason to expect, altogether so delighted Mr. Mathews, that if his affianced bride had asked for the full half of their united income in order therewith to purchase lollipops, he would not have felt disposed to make any objection.

"Well, Mr. King," he said, "my opinion is that we owe it, to Miss King's excellent judgment and understanding on all subjects, to yield to her wishes on this. In whatever way she may think proper to dispose of the five hundred a year which she has asked for, I, for one, feel perfectly confident that it will not be ill spent. A fine library, Mr. King, is a very gentlemanlike sort of thing. The sum mentioned may, perhaps, be rather out of proportion to the general income, but I am perfectly ready to consent to the terms proposed."

Having made this very amiable and conciliatory speech, Mr. Mathews looked in the face of his venerable neighbour, in full expectation of receiving an approving glance in return. But he was disappointed, for Mr. King looked anxious, and very far from satisfied.

"Come now," resumed Mr. Mathews ; "do not let us differ about a question which, after all, may turn out to be of very little importance to any of us. Depend upon it, Mr. King, Miss King will never spend her five hundred per annum in books, if she finds out that there is anything else she likes better ; and as for my side of the bargain, I will tell you, Sir, what I will agree to, in order to make it easier and more palatable to you. The fact is, you know, that if it were not for this young grandson of mine, I should not care at all, more than your daughter seems to do, about the destination of the property after we are both dead and buried ; and it may turn out that when I have seen and made acquaintance with the young chap, I may feel no great satisfaction in letting him have it either. Therefore, to give your daughter another chance of having to dispose of the whole, I shall be quite willing to have it specified

in the settlement that if I do not, by my last will and testament, constitute this said young man, known by the name of Stephen Cornington, my heir, the joint amount of the settled property is to be left at the disposal of your daughter. Will that make the arrangement more satisfactory to you, Mr. King?"

"Yes, sir, I must say it will," replied the old man; "for this young person being so perfectly unknown to you it is impossible not to feel that you may yourself be averse, in the long run, to endowing him with all your own property, and that of your wife into the bargain."

"Of course, my dear sir,—of course. Then shall it be so settled between us?" returned Mr. Mathews, turning first to the father and then to the daughter.

"Yes," replied Mr. King, "I will agree to this, if it be Mary's wish that it should be so. Though I think she is making but a bad bargain too."

But Mary was stedfast to her purpose, and replied, "I thank you heartily, my dearest father, for your compliance." And it was so that the settlements were finally drawn; a separate allowance of five hundred a year being secured to the heiress from the day of her marriage, and a right to bequeath the whole property to his grandson, Stephen Cornington, being vested in Mr. Mathews; but with the proviso that if he did not so bequeath the property to his grandson, Stephen Cornington, the right of disposing of it by will, was to revert to the said heiress.

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## CHAPTER IX.

AFTER this interesting little incident, all matters went on in the most satisfactory manner possible till the day arrived which was doomed to convert Mary King into Mary Mathews.

Not a word, not a look, and scarcely a thought arose on the part of the bride that could have been fairly quoted as a proof that she would greatly have preferred remaining single; and yet, dearly as she loved buying books, her stipulated five hundred a year did not recur to her on her wedding-day with any very cordial feeling of delight. But from the moment she decided that it would be more wrong to torment the last days of

her father by opposing him, than it would be to marry Mr. Mathews, greatly as she would have preferred remaining single, her mind had become perfectly tranquil on the subject, and she would as soon have thought of being unhappy because the days were short and cold at Christmas, as because she was going to have a husband when she would rather have remained without one.

There was a good deal of sound practical philosophy in this, but the strong and sturdy resoluteness which led to it had not been acquired without an effort more determined than agreeable. She felt fully repaid, however, for all it might have cost her, by the effect which her marriage produced on her father; for he positively looked a dozen years younger as he addressed her as "Mrs. Mathews;" every meal was eaten with relish, and every word he spoke was uttered with gaiety.

None of this was lost upon his daughter, and she received it as a well-pleased creditor receives the payment of a debt that was doubtful, and her heart gave a receipt in full for it most thankfully.

Nevertheless, this comfortable satisfaction at the result of the deed she had done did not render her unmindful of all the necessary regulations requisite to ensure the peace and comfort of her future life. She had already openly and honestly bargained with Mr. Mathews for the uncontrolled disposal of her time, and the adhering to this bargain she felt to be of infinitely more importance to her happiness than even the unchecked expenditure of her now ample book-fund.

"I must begin at once," reasoned the well-judging Mrs. Mathews. "If I begin at once, and firmly, I may go on easily; but any relaxation of discipline at first may be fatal."

The result of this reasoning was her giving a smiling, but very decided refusal to her bridegroom's polite proposal the morning after their marriage, that they should take a walk together in the home pastures.

"No, Mr. Mathews!" she said, in the most amiable manner possible: "no! neither now, nor upon any future occasion can I do anything of the kind. I think, my good friend, that you must remember my having told you on the day when I accepted your proposal, that I had been accustomed all my life to have my time left entirely at my own disposal, and you must remember also that you promised it should be so still."

"Most certainly, my dearest Mrs. Mathews—most certainly I remember it perfectly! And I remember, too, that I admired

then, as I do now, the very great superiority of mind which rendered you so independent of all frivolous amusements. I only thought that you might perhaps like a little walk, because it is such a very beautiful day ! ”

“ My habits are too inveterate, Mr. Mathews,” she replied, “ for even a beautiful day to change them.”

“ Well, to be sure ! my wife is one of ten thousand ! ” he exclaimed ; “ I don’t know how to be thankful enough for my own happiness ! ” and these grateful words were accompanied by an attempt to take her hand. How it was that the attempt failed Mr Mathews himself would have been greatly at a loss to explain ; but fail it certainly did.

“ A wonderful woman ! —a most wonderful and extraordinary woman you certainly are, my dear Mrs. Mathews ! Everybody knows what an admirable daughter you have made, and now I feel,” he added with an air of rapture, “ that you will be equally admirable as a wife.”

“ I don’t know that, Mr. Mathews,” replied the bride, rather gravely ; “ nay, I am not quite sure but that there may be some danger of the contrary. If I am a good daughter, it is probably because I learned to be so when I was young. That time for learning how to behave is past, Mr. Mathews, and all you can reasonably hope now is that if I am not young enough to learn to be very good, I may prove too old to turn out very bad. And now, good-bye. I have lost I don’t know how many minutes in idle talk, Mr. Mathews, and we must not do the same thing again, if you please, because I think it very wrong.”

And having said this, she moved off, leaving her bridegroom in a very whimsical state of doubt as to the cause of a coldness of demeanour which certainly appeared very extraordinary to him. Of her vehement love for him he felt it absolutely impossible to doubt. For what but vehement love could lead anybody of good landed property to permit the offer of her hand to be made to a gentleman ? And moreover he certainly was conscious that in the present case there was nothing very extraordinary in the fact. Wherefore, then, such coyness ? “ It may be,” thought he, “ that her great reading may have brought her acquainted with some of the many instances, which we all know must have existed, of coldness arising on the part of the husband, from the too passionate fondness of the wife.”

“ Poor thing ! ” he feelingly exclaimed in soliloquy, as he walked up and down the well-shorn lawn ; “ poor thing ! if this is the case, I really ought to be only the more tender to her.”

Mrs. Mathews meanwhile mounted her corkscrew staircase with the respectable deliberation acquired by fifty years of existence ; and then she seated herself in her queer-looking chair, at her queer-looking table, tolerably well satisfied with herself, and with the manner in which she had set about beginning her conjugal existence.

Indeed she felt much disposed to believe that she should find her Mr. Mathews as little troublesome as it was well possible for a husband to be ; and this confidence in the future caused her to look round on the rude and uncouth apartment which had been for so many years the scene of her life's chief history, with a very comfortable reliance that it would be the scene of her life's chief history still.

Nor was she without a fair portion of that pleasant hope which is probably enjoyed by all newly-married ladies who have been fortunate enough to secure a liberal allowance of pin-money, when they sit down for the first time after their marriage, and meditate in solitude upon the best and most agreeable manner of spending it.

Numerous as was her queer and miscellaneous collection of books, she perceived, as she looked around her with a business-like and scrutinising eye, that there was still room for many hundreds more ; nay, as her fancy luxuriated in the conscious power of acquisition, she began to meditate on the possibility of adding to her space by a bold inroad on a laundry, to which, though now approached by a different staircase, access might be obtained by means of knocking down an old wall, which could be done easily with such means as she had at her disposal.

And assuredly at this point of her meditation, she very nearly breathed a secret blessing on the early frailty of her husband : for, but for this marvellous discovery of the existence of Master Stephen Cornington, could she ever, by possibility, have hoped to achieve any of the mighty deeds with which she now sat regaling her fancy ? Most certainly these first hours of wedded solitude were very happy hours to Mrs. Mathews.

There stood stretching its very uncomely but most convenient length before her, the huge and heavily-burdened old table at which all her happiest hours had been spent for the last five-and-thirty years !

And what ugly-looking volumes are those which form that massive block of books set upright, and without any other support than their own solidity ?

Those, gentle reader, are Mary King's old lexicons. She has much affection, much respect, much gratitude for those dusky companions of her long years of solitude; and well she may, for they have been her preceptors, her tutors, her ever-present and ever-constant friends.

For be it known that though Mary King, as she truly averred, had been taught nothing, she had contrived somehow or other to learn everything. No! not so—not quite everything; but fervent inclination, steadfast will, and unwearying perseverance had enabled her to acquire very much.

Few women, perhaps, in any land have ever made themselves so thoroughly acquainted with Latin; she had never indeed composed any nonsense verses, and might, if put to it, have sometimes blundered about quantities; but she read the language with perfect facility.

To any one who has really attained this power, the acquisition of Italian, Spanish, and French is a work of no great difficulty, and to her it might have seemed like a matter of mere idle amusement, had it not been for the importance she attached to the business of collecting around her the tools (as she called these varieties of human speech) which were necessary to put her in easy communication with the thoughts of her fellow-creatures.

But though she could devour a volume in either of these languages with as much ease and as much pleasure as if it were written in her own, it is more than probable that had she attempted to pronounce half-a-dozen words in either of them, no Frenchman, Spaniard, or Italian would have been found capable of guessing with any tolerable degree of success what she was about.

But on this point she ran no risk of discomfiture, for the immense perseverance and ardent energy of purpose which had enabled her to acquire all she knew, were not more remarkable, or more strikingly indicative of the peculiarity of her character, than was the firm resolve to keep these acquirements unknown. This fondly-cherished mystery was probably adopted at first because she feared the ridicule which such out-of-the-way pursuits might bring upon her, but as she got on perhaps, and felt how lofty was the isolated point to which she had climbed, she might have shrunk from being stared at as a thing to wonder at. Nor is it quite impossible that she might in some degree have shared the feeling attributed to misers, whose sweetest moments are said to be those during which they cheer their

souls in solitude by the contemplation of their hidden treasures.

Whatever might have been the motive for keeping her learned labours secret, the result answered well as a means of happiness ; for nothing but the unbroken solitude and perfect leisure of hours, days, weeks, and years, could have enabled her to achieve what she had done. Nor is it easy to question the wisdom of a system which produced such unceasing enjoyment. Even difficulties, and they did sometimes occur, gave less pain in the struggle than pleasure in the conquest.

After mastering Latin, which was certainly a long and laborious business, the making herself thoroughly familiar with German was her hardest task. But she achieved it ; and if ever she "purred applause" while meditating upon her own patient labours, it was when she was luxuriating in the untameable originality of German thinking.

But to advance, as we must now do, from Mary King to Mrs. Mathews, it may be observed that in this, her first *tête-à-tête* with herself in that character, she showed both her good sense and her good temper by thinking so much less of poor stupid Mr. Mathews himself than of the important advantages she was likely to derive from her union with him. The power of buying books and maps, though very important, and most exceedingly agreeable, was perhaps out-weighed in value by the increased instead of the restricted personal liberty, which she should enjoy in consequence of this important change in her condition. The newspaper readings had already commenced, and evidently with extreme satisfaction on both sides ; and a less acute observation, and a less sanguine spirit than her own might have found wherewithal to render meditation on the future very consolatory.



## CHAPTER X.

I WOULD strongly recommend to any of my fair readers, about to enter the holy state of matrimony, that they should at first setting off act upon the same principle that Mrs. Mathews did ; namely, that they should begin as they intend to go on. Had she not done this she might have found it very difficult at a later

period to have established such a system of liberty as to the disposal of her own time as she subsequently enjoyed ; and in truth her perfect success in obtaining this, together with the evident satisfaction which the new order of things produced to her father, afforded her the reward which she so justly merited in sacrificing her own wishes for the very holy purpose of gratifying his.

The usual activity in dining out, which on all such occasions occurs in a country neighbourhood, did not fail to take place upon this ; and many brides aged fifty, with less than half the acuteness of Mrs. Mathews, might have easily perceived the sly little quizzing glances which the young marriageable maidens of Weldon exchanged as they contemplated the newly-married pair.

But nothing of this kind produced the slightest effect upon her, either hidden or apparent. Her case might have been likened to that of a person walking in a slight shower of rain under the shelter of a wide-spreading umbrella ; she was aware of the shower, but she heeded it not, for no single drop reached her. And this gentle indifference on her part, together with the particularly quiet manner in which Mr. Mathews transferred himself and his personalities from his old home to his new one, made somewhat less than a nine days' wonder of their wedding.

This state of things was exceedingly satisfactory to Mrs. Mathews, and she had very soon the comfort of almost forgetting that she was a bride ; for sundry massive boxes had arrived by the luggage-train from London, and several very commodious shelves had found themselves places in odd corners of her sacred den for the accommodation of their contents.

But the perfect tranquillity of spirit which she enjoyed while watching the comfortable well-being of her father, and while indulging herself by trotting in secret, nearly all day long, on her own favourite hobby, was most unexpectedly and most completely interrupted by the arrival of the following letter by the Indian mail, addressed to Miss King, Weldon Grange, Hertfordshire, England :

“ MY DEAR MARY KING,

“ It is not very likely that you should remember as well as I do a conversation which we once held together one fine summer evening upon a bench under a lime-tree at the south-west corner of your lawn at Weldon. The conversation, as was often the case between us, took rather a metaphysical turn, and we dis-

cussed together the Swedenborgian doctrine of spirits. I accused you of having a propensity to believe in supernatural agencies, declaring that many of your projects and undertakings had been suggested to you by some influence that seemed foreign to yourself. This fanciful notion of yours has often recurred to me; for the eighteen years and three-quarters which have elapsed since I last saw you have not passed over without frequent recollections of the few weeks which preceded them. Within the last few days, indeed, this doctrine of yours has so strangely taken possession of me that I suspect I have almost adopted your creed on the subject.

"I dare say you may have heard from my friends in your neighbourhood that upon my arrival at Madras, I became a partner in a banking-house, and that I subsequently married. All other important points in my history may be comprised in very few words. My wife died about eighteen months ago, leaving me one child, a little girl, who may now, however, be almost called a woman, for she will be seventeen her next birthday. It is concerning this child that the impulse above-mentioned has fallen upon me. I have a longing to speak of her to you which I cannot resist. And this impulse! Whence comes it, dear Mary King? Certainly not from any right that I have to trouble you on such a subject. But when I tell you, dear old friend, that I am assured by a trustworthy medical attendant that I am about to die, I feel sure that you will receive the appeal I make to you without any mixture of anger.

"I have, for some years, been in failing health; but my malady, they say, can be baffled no longer, and before many months are over, my poor little Janet is likely to be left very sadly alone in the world. On her mother's side she has not, I believe, a single relation; and my brother James, who is still a bachelor, and a professor at a Scotch university, is the only relative that I know on my side.

"She will not, I flatter myself, be destitute of the means of living like a gentlewoman, although on this point I am not so well informed as I ought to be. I have been a partner in Moxley's bank, at Madras, for above eighteen years; but I have never, as yet, received anything but income from it; my three partners being in the same predicament, and all being of opinion that we could not have drawn capital from the concern, without injuring it. At my death, however, the accounts will be gone into, and I am led to believe that my dear little girl will not have less than five, or it may be seven, thousand

pounds. This is not very much ; but it will, at least, make her independent, and may suffice, as I hope, to make her comfortable.

" Yet still her unprotected situation terrifies me. There are many persons here who are very kind to us ; but not one to whom I can look with satisfaction as the protector of my orphan girl. I well remember what our acquaintance was, Mary King, how accidentally it began, and how abruptly it ended ; and if you remember all this as well as I do, it is possible that you may consider my present application to you as foolish, unauthorized, and unjustifiable.

" But there are certain impressions left on my memory also, not so easily defined, but quite as ineffaceable. This may or may not be the case with you, and on this question hangs the success of my present petition to you on the behalf of my dear Janet.

" I have told her that it is my wish that she should go to England as soon as the affairs of the bank are sufficiently settled for her to know herself, poor child ! what her amount of fortune is. I have also written to my worthy brother, who, I flatter myself, has not quite forgotten me, begging him to find her an asylum in the house of some Scotch cousin, or friend, till she is of age, or married.

" But though I have already taken these precautions to prevent the possibility that my child should be absolutely unknown to any one in Europe, yet one of those mysterious influences, of which we used to talk together, has so strongly impressed upon my mind the idea that you might feel sufficient interest for my girl to induce you to take charge of her for a few weeks upon her first arrival in England, that I have yielded to it, in spite of all that common sense could urge to the contrary.

" There is, I am assured, no chance whatever of my living long enough to receive your answer to this strange petition ; nevertheless, I feel easier and happier since I resolved upon making it. All I will venture to urge upon you, however, as the dying request of your old acquaintance is that you should see my poor Janet before you decide upon the possibility, or impossibility, of letting her be with you for a week or two before she proceeds to Scotland.

" This is a long letter for me to write, Mary King, and it has taken three days to accomplish it. I have already given my child written instructions to proceed to Weldon as soon as pos-

sible after she reaches England, to lodge herself at the principal inn (is it still the "Hare and Hounds ?") and to send the little note, I have given to her for you, to the Grange.

"When you receive it I feel strongly tempted to believe that you will permit her to call upon you. Adieu, Mary ! Forgive whatever you may have thought wrong in my conduct, either now or formerly.

"You will think but lowly of my decision of character when I tell you that I cannot quite make up my mind upon the question of being wrong or right, either now or then.

"Remember me kindly to your good father. I have heard of your both being well within the last month. Once more, Farewell !

"Yours truly,  
"JOHN ANDERSON."

Considering the philosophic tone and character of my heroine's mind—and her mind really was of a philosophic tone and character—this letter produced a much more violent effect than might have been expected. Neither was the nature of the emotion more accordant with what might have been anticipated, than was its degree.

Those who have read the passages which have been given as extracts from her journal, when the image of John Anderson was most fresh upon her mind, might presume that this announcement of his approaching, or more probably of his actual death, would have affected her with feelings of deep sorrow and very mournful regret.

But nothing at all resembling this was the result. She had in truth so long, and so completely made up her mind to the fact that they were separated for ever, that no new idea, no fresh emotion, was produced by this letter on that score.

But there were other feelings produced by it, which, if not absolutely new, were now for the first time brought home to her heart with the soothing conviction that they were well founded, reasonable, and rational, and not the contemptible vapours of a love-lorn old maiden's fancy.

This letter of John Anderson, together with the request it contained, at once convinced her common sense that she had not deluded herself. Notwithstanding his profound silence on the subject, it was certain that she *had* made an impression on his heart, and that, too, of a nature not only deep and enduring, but productive of very high esteem, and very perfect confidence.

Had Mrs. Mathews not entertained that high opinion of herself which has been already confessed to the reader, this proof of John Anderson's attachment to her would not have been felt so sensibly. But she had in truth suffered a great deal during the last twenty years of her life, from her doubts whether her vanity had not beguiled her into persuading herself that the said John Anderson had loved her, though circumstances had prevented his telling her so.

Had these circumstances been different, had John Anderson been rich, and had she been poor, the steady silence on his part would have been very differently interpreted, and the impression left upon her mind would have been very different also. In that case, even believing that he had once loved her, Mary King would very speedily have conquered all sentimental regrets concerning him. But as the circumstances, financially speaking, were exactly the reverse between them, it was evident either that he did *not* love her well enough to make her his wife, or that he had shrunk from making a proposal which might so easily have been interpreted as mercenary.

It was the uncertainty produced by this doubt, which had for so many years kept the question alive, and most tormentingly awake in her mind. There was no chance of any future meeting taking place to cure this, for his marriage had settled all doubts upon that point for ever ; yet still the question was one of very exciting interest. She could but ill endure the feeling of self-contempt which the possibility of her having fancied herself beloved, when there was no such thing, brought with it. Yet with all her conscious self-control and power of mind, she had never been able to banish the subject so effectually from her memory, as to prevent its often tormenting her.

But the arrival of poor Anderson's farewell letter settled the point at once, and the hour in which she read it was an important epoch in her existence. As she thought of his being gone for ever, she felt, probably, as most other women would have done under similar circumstances. But it was not *that*, it was not her sorrow for his death which was the important feature of the occurrence. She had known long ago that she had lost him for ever, and her knowledge of his death added nothing to her feeling of certainty on this point. The important feature was in the improvement of the terms on which the letter placed her with herself. She now, for the first time, knew, with well-assured certainty, that she had not been the dupe of her own vanity. She had *not* placed herself side by side with all the

vainly sighing nymphs whose folly had been her scorn from the early age of fourteen to her present mature half-century.

This was a great comfort, and as the cheering idea suggested itself she uttered the words, "Thank God!" as fervently as if she had been returning thanks upon finding that she had escaped from half-suspected hydrophobia.

Having thus cordially welcomed this unhoped-for blessing, she was in no bad mood to enjoy likewise the pleasurable, though melancholy, reminiscences which this precious letter awakened.

Did she remember their metaphysical discussions?

Did she remember *that* particular discussion under the lime-tree?

Had she ever forgotten that, or any other, conversation that had ever passed between them?

Most certainly not. But it was now for the first time that she recalled them with unmixed pleasure. There was no disgrace now, no folly in remembering among the unchanged scenes where they had conversed together, the themes which he had remembered among all the changes and chances of his varied life.

Having indulged, and certainly enjoyed for a considerable time, the, to her, perfectly new recreation of sentimental recollections, her middle-aged countenance suddenly became almost radiant with an expression of new-born hope and happiness; for she at that moment ceased to think of herself at all, and only remembered that it might be possible for her to be useful to the orphan daughter of John Anderson.



## CHAPTER XI.

It was easy enough, in fact almost as easy as it was delightful, to fancy the sort of occupation, the sort of interest, the sort of happiness which the having John Anderson's child for ever with her, would afford her. But it was not quite so easy to settle with herself how this matter was to be arranged, so as to satisfy all the yearnings of her heart towards this newly found child.

Nothing had been said as yet, at least not to her, concerning any wish or intention on the part of Mr. Mathews of inviting his grandson to visit him, and at that moment Mrs. Mathews almost felt as if she would have willingly given up her cherished five hundred a year, as well as the future disposal of her property, could she by so doing have ensured the eternal absence of the threatened Mr. Stephen Cornington.

To ensure this absence, however, was impossible, and Mrs. Mathews could only rejoice that her guest was likely to be the first in the field, and, as she flattered herself, firmly established at Weldon Grange, before it was possible for the grandson to make his appearance.

A little further and more deliberate reflection served rather to strengthen her hopes than to weaken them.

She then remembered, with exceeding satisfaction, the enlarged power which her precious five hundred a-year would give her of embellishing the life of the dear Janet, without laying either of them under obligations to anybody. The seven thousand, or even the five thousand pounds, spoken of as Janet's fortune, would be quite enough to prevent any anxieties about the future, and long before it was necessary to leave her library and appear at the dinner table, she found herself positively quizzing her own monomania upon the subject of buying books.

"I rather think that I shall have sufficient ingenuity now, to find other ways of spending money agreeably, besides buying books; and this will be a decided enlargement of mind, for hitherto no such possibility has ever occurred to me."

This was the idea which most effectively soothed her spirits when her thoughts turned from the young friend she hoped to find to the old friend whom she had assuredly lost; and it enabled her to announce the tidings of John Anderson's death to her father with much less of sorrow and sadness than she would have felt without it.

She found no difficulty in awakening the kind-hearted old man's recollection of the agreeable young Scotchman, who had been such a general favourite in the neighbourhood, and she did this without making it at all apparent that she had ever thought more about him herself than everybody else had done; and then she dwelt a little upon the pleasure she felt at finding that so very amiable a man had retained so friendly a recollection of them as to make him anxious that the young daughter, who was so soon to be left an orphan, should be made known to them. And to all this her good father listened with greater

symptoms of knowing who and what she was talking about than she had hoped to find.

This first very satisfactory conversation on the subject took place during a short *tête-à-tête* which preceded Mr. King's after-dinner nap, and when it was over she left him to sleep upon it; moreover, on his awakening, she had the pleasure to find, that far from having forgotten what she had told him, he immediately began talking of it again.

This was excellent and hopeful, for there could not be a more thoroughly kind heart in any human breast than that which had not yet ceased to beat in the bosom of Mr. King; and if he once got it into his head that his house would be a pleasant asylum for the orphan child of an old friend, there was no doubt whatever of his earnestly wishing to get her there.

Her next step, of course, was to open the subject to her husband, and so far was she from encountering any opposition from him, that it was immediately evident that he liked the idea of the young lady's visit exceedingly.

In fact the happy bridegroom and proud grandfather had already confided to the post a very gracious answer to the letter which had announced to him the existence of Mr. Stephen Cornington, and he felt rather more certain than he had thought it necessary to mention to his lady, that the probable effect of that epistle would be to bring the youthful portrait of himself to his feet with as little delay as possible. Now it seemed evident, that if he accorded an amiable welcome to an unknown young friend invited by his lady, she must perforce accord an amiable welcome to the unknown young grandson invited by himself. He, therefore, lost not a moment before he expressed the very strongest satisfaction at hearing that there was a chance of her having a young friend come to visit her. "Nothing, certainly," said he, "could be more fortunate than her coming to us at this particular time. It will be necessary for us, you know, to give several dinner parties in return for all the invitations we have received, and the having a young person staying with us will make everything go off so very pleasantly. I must say that I like having young people staying in the house very much."

Could she desire better sympathy?—or could she avoid telling him that she felt upon the subject exactly as he did?

For a day or two after this announcement on her part, of the probable arrival of Janet Anderson, the family trio never found themselves together without some pleasant allusion being made

to this much wished-for event ; but day by day it seemed gradually to die away, for no further tidings arrived concerning her. It need scarcely be said, however, that hope and expectation were as much alive as ever in the mind of Mrs. Mathews ; and her first thought in the morning, and her last at night was still of Janet. But, alas ! week after week wore away, and still she got no further news either of John Anderson or of John Anderson's daughter. Day after day she read the news from India with what might fairly be called the hope of seeing the death of her old friend recorded there ; for well she knew that John Anderson would not have written such a letter as she had received from him had there been any chance of his recovery. But either his death had not yet occurred or he was not a person of sufficient consequence to have it recorded in such a manner as to reach her. The uncertainty was very painful, and the more so as there was no human being near her to whom she could express her anxiety or discuss the causes which occasioned it.

One dark, very rainy, and very windy evening in the early part of April, just as she was quitting her book-room, in order to go down, as usual, to make tea for her father and her husband, she was startled by hearing the house-door bell ring. The strongest possible conviction that Janet was arrived immediately took possession of her, and the rapidity with which she descended her corkscrew stairs might have done honour to the activity of fifteen. By the time she reached the first landing-place, which was that upon which the best bedrooms opened, conjecture seemed to be changed for certainty ; for there could no longer be any doubt that a stranger had arrived.

Clearly and distinctly audible above all other sounds was a voice that she had never heard before, and though it was very certain it was not a female voice, it might proceed from the attendant of Janet Anderson, though it could not proceed from herself.

A very brief interval, however, sufficed to bring the active lady into the hall ; but she looked around it in vain for some young female figure, which, if she had found it, would have been straightway encircled in her arms without any question asked.

But, alas ! "there was no such thing" Nevertheless there was an arrival ; but, instead of a youthful female it was, beyond all question, a youthful male. For though its careful envelopment from the cold of that stormy night might have been

equally judicious to an individual of either sex, and though, moreover, the hairy decoration of the youthful face consisted of short curls instead of long moustaches,—yet the height of the figure precluded the possibility of any doubt as to the sex.

But Mrs. Mathews had rushed forward too precipitately, to permit her quietly stealing out of it, in the hope that the mystery of this arrival might be explained to her at leisure. The stranger took little heed of her, however, for he was very busy. First he handed a sealed packet to the servant, which he said was to be delivered instantly to Mr. Mathews; and, this done, he himself threw the house-door wide open, to admit the entrance of a large trunk, which the driver of his post-chaise was dragging in. Mrs. Mathews, however, paused not to ascertain what was going on in the hall, but, passing hastily on into the sitting-room, perceived her husband standing at the tea-table, and preparing to peruse, by the light of the candles which stood upon it, the contents of the packet which he had that moment opened.

Mrs. Mathews passed him, and went straight to her father, who, as usual, was sitting half asleep in his arm-chair, near the fire.

“Do you know who the person is, father, who is just arrived here?” said she, not without some faint hope that it might prove to be an *avant courier* to Janet Anderson.

“The person!—what person? Who has arrived here, Mary? Is the young lady come at last?” said the old man, rousing himself.

“I cannot tell who it is,” replied his vexed daughter, looking almost jealously at her husband, who appeared to be very eagerly reading his dispatch.

“Who is it, Mathews? What have you got reading there?” said Mr. King, who, like his daughter, had some notion that the arrival and despatch might have some connection with the young lady who had been so long expected. “What is it all about, Mathews?” reiterated the old gentleman, impatiently.

“Upon my word, sir, I can hardly tell you,” replied Mr. Mathews, whose colour was considerably heightened, and who seemed altogether much agitated.

And then, looking up from his letter and perceiving his wife, he said,—

“Oh, my dear, are you there? The most extraordinary thing has happened, Mary! Upon my honour and word I don’t understand anything about it, I don’t indeed. I do assure you, my

dear Mary, I do assure you, Mr. King, that I never invited him to come in this way! I should never have dreamed of doing such a thing, without consulting you both about it. But what am I to do now? How is it possible for me to send him away, and in such a night as this too? I am sure I know no more than the child unborn what I ought to do, and I really do wish that one or both of you would tell me."

"I dare say, Mr. Mathews, that it would be very easy for one or both of us to give you an opinion on the subject, did we happen to know who the young gentleman is," replied Mrs. Mathews, quietly; for she had perfectly recovered her accustomed composure, upon discovering that the stranger, whoever it might be, was a consignment to him, and not to her.

"It is my grandson, my dear;" replied her husband, as distinctly as if he had been reading the newspaper.

It was not an easy thing to make Mrs. Mathews start, but she did start now. It was so very near a relation that was thus so unexpectedly introduced to her notice that her surprise almost overpowered for a moment her habitual self-possession.

"Do you think I ought to send him away such a terrible night as this, my dear?" said Mr. Mathews, plaintively.

"Certainly not, Mr. Mathews, if you mean to acknowledge this stranger as your grandson. It is quite impossible, I am sure, that my father should wish you to do so."

Thus gently reminded that the house, to which this really unexpected grandson had been consigned, belonged neither to himself nor his wife, but to Mr. King, the puzzled grandfather went up to the old man's chair, and laying his hand coaxingly on his shoulder, said—

"Shall I be asking too much, my dearest sir, if I beg your permission to let this poor boy remain here just for the present? This letter is from Mrs. Briot, his grandmother, of whom, as you know, I have seen nothing for many years. But she tells me now, as her former letter did, you know also, that my poor son is dead, and that this young boy has not a friend in the world to whom he can look for help, except myself. What do you think, my dear sir, I ought to do under the circumstances? Such a night as it is too! One would not turn a dog from the door! What can I do? What do you think I ought to do, Mr. King?"

"Desire him to come in, of course, Mr. Mathews, and let us give him some warm tea, unless there is any other refreshment

that he may like better this cold evening," replied the kind-hearted old man.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness—I am, indeed, my dear sir," replied the greatly relieved Mr. Mathews, very cordially ; "and I have the pleasure of knowing," he added, "that my dear wife will be sure to approve whatever her father does ; and God knows that if the young friend she has been expecting were to come at last, which I heartily hope she may do, there is nothing in the world I would not do to make her welcome, if she were to stay here with us to the end of her days—or ours, rather ! Then I may go and tell this poor boy that he may come in, may I ?" he continued, looking first at his wife and then at her father.

"By all means," said Mrs. Mathews, with a civil smile.

"To be sure you may ! Don't keep him waiting any longer, Mathews," said her father, kindly.

Thus sanctioned, Mr. Mathews left the room, and after the interval of a few minutes returned to it, leading by the arm a very tall and very handsome youth, apparently about twenty years of age.

There must unquestionably have been some consciousness of the awkwardness of such a very unexpected intrusion in the young man's feelings, at finding himself thus the centre of six wondering eyes, without counting the distended orbs of the footman, but his bearing did not betray it ; on the contrary, his handsome face was radiant with smiles, and he looked as if he were quite ready to enjoy the warm comforts among which he had so unexpectedly entered, and to make those he found in possession of them ready and joyful to share them all with him.

There is so much of almost irresistible attraction in youth, and youthful beauty, that few are found insensible to their influence ; and when to these are added the perhaps still greater fascination of ready smiles, and the fearless freedom of address which seems to ask for and to offer friendship, it is difficult indeed not to throw off reserve and to welcome a youthful stranger so gifted with kindness and cordiality.

And such appeared likely to be the result in the present instance, for however little the unexpected arrival of a stranger so circumstanced might have been wished for by either of the three sober-minded personages before whom he had so unexpectedly presented himself, there was not one of them who could look at him with an unkind or even grave expression of countenance.

The features of Mr. Mathews in particular, though he was very decidedly the individual most disposed to feel annoyed by this sudden intrusion, seemed to express, in spite of him, both admiration and pleasure.

It is but fair to confess, however, that most old bachelors of sixty-five, having reached that mature age without ever having been greeted as a relative by anything either young or handsome, might have been weak enough to like being called grandfather by such a captivating young fellow as this stranger.

He was, as I have already said, considerably above the common height ; yet, young as he was, there was nothing like want of muscle and fibre in his frame. He was, indeed, admirably well made ; and though perhaps a skilful anatomical eye might have discerned more promise of an *athlète* than an Apollo in its future development, it would never have entered the head of any one to attach the epithet of clumsy to his stalwart limbs.

His features were not precisely what we call regular, yet they were very far from being uncomely. His mouth was large, but his teeth splendidly beautiful, and his dark eyes decidedly among the most magnificent that Nature ever gave to illumine a human countenance.

His hair, short, thick, and crisply curling, was of bright but very dark chesnut, defying the most envious to hint at the odious epithet red ; though it was not impossible that his beard, if he ever permitted its becoming of sufficient length to betray the secret, might deserve to be so classed.

His complexion was the *beau ideal* of youth and health, but it was neither very florid nor greatly the reverse, nor was he very dark nor very fair ; and to sum up my description in one intelligible phrase, he was superbly handsome.

It took but a very short time after he was fairly introduced to the fireside to make him look as if he felt himself very comfortably and happily at home ; and how was it possible to look at that bright young face and not sympathise with his obvious enjoyment of being there !

Mr. King and Mr. Mathews were both of them remarkable for their gentle kindly tempers ; and there was a joyous smile upon the face of each as they contemplated the undisguised contentment of their unexpected guest, which very cordially declared him to be welcome, notwithstanding the strange abruptness of his *entrée*.

In the character of Mrs. Mathews there were so many qualities and peculiarities, more remarkable than mere easiness of

temper, that nobody, not even her own father, though he had never seen any approach to ill-humour in her since the hour she was born, would have thought of using the phrase “good-tempered” as a suitable description of his daughter ; but even *her* more thoughtful countenance now relaxed as theirs did, into a smile, as the young stranger gave a glance of his bright eyes to each of them in succession, which seemed to say, “Don’t I look very comfortable ?”

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## CHAPTER XII.

AND now the hissing tea-urn was brought in, and Mrs. Mathews set herself to the performance of her duties at the tea-table ; but Mr. King, perceiving that the young traveller took advantage of her withdrawing her chair from the chimney corner in order to draw his own nearer to the fire, laid his own hand kindly upon that of the stranger, and finding the touch of it exceedingly like that of a piece of ice, he exclaimed, “My dear Mary, this young gentleman is a perfect icicle ! I dare say that your tea-pot will suffice to make us stay-at-homes very comfortable ; but upon my word, my dear, I think if we don’t give him something rather more restorative, we shall never be able to thaw him.”

“How very, very kind you are, my dear Mr King !” exclaimed the grateful grandfather, in an accent which showed plainly enough that the long-delayed claim upon his paternity was not listened to with indifference now that it was made. “I certainly do think,” he added, following the example of his hospitable father-in-law, and laying his own comfortably warm hand upon that of the young man, “I certainly do think that a tumbler of warm negus, or even of brandy-and-water would be very well bestowed. May I ring ?”

“Pray do, Mr. Mathews,” said his wife, to whom the question was addressed ; and she, too, spoke very kindly ; and the bell was lustily rung, and the cordially-given order for all that was needful very promptly obeyed, and the handsome young man in as fair a way of being made comfortable as his heart could wish.

And how did he testify his feelings for the genial welcome thus bestowed upon him by three utter strangers?

Such a pair of eyes as his are not only ornamental but very useful too; for it would have been difficult for any words he could have uttered to have expressed one half as much gratitude, tenderness, and pleasure as beamed forth in their soft but lustrous glances.

His first glance was directed to Mrs. Mathews, and it was exactly such a one as a grateful and loving son might have bestowed on a watchful and loving mother. Mrs. Mathews was much struck by it.

The full bright eye was next turned upon old Mr. King, and whether the somewhat dim-eyed old man was conscious of the eloquent expression of that look or not, assuredly his daughter was, for she was instantly aware that no eyes she had ever seen before could so successfully have expressed both reverence and gratitudo.

And then the young man looked towards his newly-found grandfather, and it would have required a much harder heart than that possessed by good Mr. Mathews not to have been touched to the very quick by the feeling at once tender and reverential which beamed upon him from that look.

But all this, powerful as the effect was which it produced, passed in a few seconds; but a few more were given to silent emotion, for there was not one of the party who did not appear struck, and in some sort affected by the strongly-evinced sensibility of the young stranger.

"And now, my dear boy," said Mr. Mathews, as soon as he thought he could speak without betraying more emotion than he wished to display, "now tell me what I must call you. To the best of my knowledge and belief I have never yet heard your name."

"I am called Stephen Cornington, Sir," replied the youth, in a tone wherein a delicate ear might have detected a painful consciousness that he had no good right to any name at all.

Mrs. Mathews felt this, and she looked at him earnestly for a moment.

But a look from the small grey eyes of Mrs. Mathews was a very different thing from the eye-beams which flashed from the lustrous orbs of Stephen Cornington; for it was easy enough for her to look at anybody without the anybody being at all aware of it; whereas young Stephen Cornington must have

taken some pains to look in the face of any human being without its being very clearly evident that he did so.

The announcement of his name was followed by a short silence, and then Mr. Mathews repeated it.

"Cornington?" said he, interrogatively, "that was the maiden name of your grandmother," he added, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, Sir, it was," replied the young man in the same subdued tone.

"Then she called her son by her own name, and not by that of her husband?" said Mr. Mathews, very decidedly in a whisper.

"Yes, Sir," was again the reply, and this too was said somewhat in a whispering tone; nevertheless, the words, and the low, deep sigh which accompanied them, were heard by Mrs. Mathews.

And then the business of the moment went on, the negus was mixed, and handed to the thankful traveller, as hot as a liberal infusion of sherry would permit it to be; and the kind-hearted preparers of it had the pleasure of seeing it imbibed with every token of satisfaction by the almost frost-bitten guest.

No sooner was the tea-table dismissed, however, than Mrs. Mathews remembered that she had other hospitable duties to perform, more important still than the stirring sugar into the steaming negus; she therefore left her comfortable arm-chair, in the front of the bright, blazing fire, and prepared, with the courage of a martyr, to leave the room also for the very different atmosphere she was likely to find out of it.

But before she did this she paused for a moment behind the chair of her father, and, bending down, whispered in his ear, "The blue room, I suppose, Sir?"

"No, Mary, no; let it be the red room, my dear." But this reply was not spoken in a whisper, for good Mr. King was too much in earnest on the subject to stand upon ceremony.

Mrs. Mathews lost no time, or, at least, very little, in performing the errand for which she left the room. Most assuredly she was on hospitable thoughts intent, but there were nevertheless a few other thoughts that mixed with them. In the first place, she thought it would be a great deal better for her to summon her prime minister, Sally Spicer, to receive her orders in the den, where she knew, with a very comfortable feeling of certainty, that she should find a good fire. Nor was she disappointed; the fire was burning brightly, and before it was

placed the one only arm-chair which adorned the premises, in the most tempting position imaginable.

It was irresistible, and accordingly Mrs. Mathews seated herself, before ringing the bell, for the purpose of holding a short consultation with herself ; and thus it was she began :

“ Most certainly it is the handsomest face I ever looked at—most certainly it is ! Who would have ever guessed that my honoured husband could possess such a grandson ? It is not impossible that if all the thoughts of my heart were exposed to mortal eyes at this moment I might be accused of jealousy—jealousy of this handsome young fellow’s grandmother. It may be so. It has been so very often said in tale and history that we do not know ourselves, that I must be as obstinate as a Turk, or an unbelieving Jew, if I doubted the fact ;—wherefore I will make myself ready to allow that I may be jealous, and the more willingly, because, if it be so, that may explain the reason of what is, without some recondite explanation, perfectly unintelligible. For why do I not like him ?—so surpassingly handsome as he is ; so cordial, so amiable as he is in his manner to every one of us. Why do I not like him ? Assuredly it is a clear case. I am—I must be—jealous of his grandmother ! ”

And having seemingly come to this conclusion, much to her own satisfaction, for a very merry sort of smile lighted up her features as she muttered the confession, she sat for some time as if too completely lost in reverie to be capable of any more solitary mutterings for the present.

But then, again, the long-acquired habit returned upon her, and though it would have been no easy matter for a bystander to interpret very accurately what she uttered, she certainly did utter something which might, with tolerable accuracy, be rendered thus :

“ But suppose, now, that instead of confessing jealousy, I were to bring myself in guilty of envy ; might not that do as well as a proof of my humility ? May I not feel something like envy at seeing my quiet, easily-pleased husband enjoying the unexpected happiness of cherishing the offspring of one, of course, he was more or less attached to ; while I, after having had the hope given me that the whole of my future life might be cheered by embellishing the existence and winning the affection of John Anderson’s orphan child, find myself engaged in the task of ministering to the wants and wishes of Miss Cornington’s grandson, instead ? Yea, verily ! it is not jealousy, but envy, that makes me fancy I see something in that handsome

face that does not altogether please me. Poor youth! he looked most desperately cold, and despite his beautiful smiles, he looked very weary too. But the red room!—why if the queen were to ask for a night's lodging here, we could only put her to sleep in the red room. And suppose, after all, that Janet should arrive? Nothing is impossible; she might come six months hence, after everybody here, excepting her father's old friend, had forgotten all about her. And if she did, and if this young Hercules had taken possession of the red room, the same room that her father slept in the only night that this roof ever sheltered him—if this should happen, how should I like it? I will not trust myself; I know I could not bear it decently, and therefore, good father, I must take the liberty of lodging my newly-discovered grandson in the blue room."

Having come to this decision, Mrs. Mathews rose, and rang the bell; whereupon, with as little delay as the corkscrew staircase would permit, Sally Spicer stood before her.

Now Mrs. Mathews had very few secrets that she kept from Sally Spicer. She never, indeed, had thought it advisable to inform her that she had probably read more books than any woman in Europe; neither had she ever felt called upon to inform her she had once been very near falling in love with a Scotch gentleman, called John Anderson; but in most other respects the union between them was a very confidential one, and Sally Spicer knew perfectly well why it was that her mistress had become Mrs. Mathews, after remaining for fifty years so very contentedly as Mary King.

Upon Sally's now entering the den, her mistress pointed first to a chair, and then to the chimney-corner, upon which Sally, who was perfectly familiar with all her lady's telegraphic signals, wasted no time in ceremony, but immediately seated herself as directed.

"Who do you think this young gentleman is, Sally?" said Mrs. Mathews, looking very demurely in the old woman's face.

"How should I know, Miss Mary? asking your pardon, Mrs. Mathews," replied Sally

"That is very true, my good Sally; it is quite impossible that you should either know or guess," replied Mrs. Mathews, "and therefore I will tell you. This young gentleman, Sally, is my grandson."

"Dear me, ma'am!" replied Sally, laughing, as she knew she must be expected to do, "What can you mean, I wonder, by saying that?"

"Upon my word I don't mean any joke," returned Mrs. Mathews; "when men and women marry, you know, Sally, the relatives of one become the relatives of the other. Mr. Cornington, that is his name, Sally, Mr. Cornington is the grandson of Mr. Mathews."

"I ask your pardon, ma'am," said Sally Spicer, with rather more of respectful reserve in her manner than usual, "I ask your pardon, I'm sure, for my blundering, but I thought as Mr. Mathews was a single gentleman up to the time when you married him."

Mrs. Mathews did not smile, no, not the least in the world, for in spite of all her odd ways she was a very well-behaved gentlewoman; but after the pause of a few seconds, she replied, "You were quite right, Sally. Mr. Mathews was never married before. But when he was a young man he became, as he told my father very honourably before we were married, the father of a son by a woman whom he has never seen since, and the young man who arrived here this evening is his grandson."

"Yes, ma'am," returned Sally, casting down her eyes very respectfully, but evidently feeling a good deal shocked.

"How long he will stay here, Sally," resumed her mistress, "I really do not know. That of course must depend upon circumstances; but my dear, kind father has invited him to stay here for the present, and so you must get the blue room ready for him."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the good woman, rising with alacrity, and considerably relieved in her mind at hearing that it *was* the blue room and not the red one, which was to be prepared upon this most unexpected occasion; "Yes, ma'am! we shall be less than no time about it, Hannah and me together. But, in course, the sheets have got to be aired, and so I must not stay talking any longer I think."

"Quite true, Sally," returned her mistress, "and I, too, have no business to be sitting here."

And so saying she rose, not without reluctance, from her favourite chair, quitted her beloved den, and returned to the parlour fully determined that no feeling, whether proceeding from envy, or jealousy, or love for her den, or dislike to anything else, should lead her to do anything, or to leave anything undone, which Mr. Mathews might interpret into unkindness or incivility to the youth whom he had so readily welcomed as a grandson.

## CHAPTER XIII.

On returning to the parlour she found the young stranger and her husband sitting very lovingly side by side, and her dear old father looking with gentle benevolence on them both. It really was a most amiable picture, and Mrs. Mathews, though fresh from her den, whence she sometimes certainly brought rather cynical feelings, was in no way disposed to disturb its harmony.

The blooming, though very decidedly sleepy, Stephen Cornington, turned his handsome head towards her as she entered, and eagerly moved his chair so as to make room for hers, close to the fire, and close beside himself.

"Is it not a very cold night, ma'am?" said he, assisting her as she placed her chair almost on the hearth-rug.

"It is, indeed," she replied; "and as I suspect that travelling in such weather must make you long for a bed, beyond anything else, I have given orders that you shall have one immediately made ready for you. But I must beg you to tell me whether I am right in fancying that you would rather go to bed than wait till a more substantial supper can be prepared for you than our tea-table has afforded."

"Indeed, dear lady, you *are* right!" replied the young man, looking at her very gratefully. "Did you know all the happiness I feel from the more than kind reception I have met with here, you might wonder perhaps that I should not wish to sit up all night in order to think of it. But I was up this morning very early, and I certainly feel now not exactly as if I wanted to sleep, but as if I wanted to lie down and think over all that has happened to me since I lay down last."

"No wonder! no wonder, my dear boy!" said Mr. Mathews, affectionately tapping him on the knee. "No supper in the world would do you so much good as going to bed."

"Upon my word I think so too," said the venerable master of the mansion, accompanying the words with a smile of the most hospitable kindness. And this in its turn was repaid with a grateful bow, and the words, "Thank you, my dear sir! I thank you with all my heart for your great kindness to me."

A few more gentle words, and a few more gentle looks, and a few applications of the poker to the fire, for the purpose of making it burn brighter, though it burned as brightly as possible before, sufficed to occupy the time till Sally Spicer opened the door, and coming close to the chair of her mistress, audibly pronounced the welcome words, "Everything is ready now, ma'am."

"Well then, I think we must keep you no longer, Mr. Cornington," said the lady of the mansion. "My maid will show you the way to your room, and I hope you will find it comfortable, and that you will sleep well."

"Thank you again a thousand times for all your kindness!" replied the young man, seizing her hand, and raising it to his lips with a sort of hasty fervour which made it evident that the feeling which led him to do so was irresistible,—"Thank you a thousand, and a thousand times! Oh! how few are there who, situated as you are, would have acted as you have done!"

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Mathews, quietly withdrawing her hand, and applying it to the tongs for the purpose of still further improving the fire. "Well, then, good night," she resumed, having completed the operation, and perceiving when she turned round again, that the grateful young man was keeping her father standing longer than was good for him, while he dwelt upon the unbounded hospitality of which he was the object.

He took the hint with smiling quickness, and having once more wrung the hand of his grandfather, he seized upon the bed-candle which Sally Spicer held ready for him, and with a good-humoured glance of his bright eyes full in her face, exclaimed, "Now then, you kind-looking agent of the very kindest of mistresses, go on and show me the way."

Sally, too, smiled as she returned his glance with one of almost wondering admiration; and obeying the gay signal with which he pointed towards the door, she preceded him through it, and then turned and closed it after him.

Mr. Mathews looked as if he felt this to be an important moment. He was about to hear the opinion of his wife, and his wife's father, upon this newly-found grandson, of whom, to confess the truth, he certainly felt exceedingly proud.

Mr. King replaced himself in his easy chair. Mrs. Mathews walked to a small table near the window, and took possession of her knitting apparatus, with which she seated herself at the table, as near to the fire as she conveniently could. Mr.

Mathews looked from one to the other, and would have been well pleased if either of them would have expressed an opinion of the youth who had just left their presence. But Mr. King looked silently in the face of his son-in-law, and Mrs. Mathews looked silently at her stocking. Both the father and daughter perhaps felt that there would be something awkward in congratulating an elderly gentleman so nearly connected with them upon the unexpected arrival of a grandson under such peculiar circumstances; perhaps they both thought it would be better to let him speak first. And, as it happened, Mr. Mathews did not long feel any difficulty in doing so.

"Well!" he began, drawing a long breath, but not in a way that in any degree resembled a sigh, "Well!—this is a most unexpected thing to be sure! But he is an uncommonly fine young man, isn't he?"

"Yes, indeed," was pronounced at the same instant by both father and daughter; and Mr. King added very cordially,—

"Upon my word, Mathews, I must say that he is not merely what people call a fine young man, but that he is positively the handsomest fellow I ever saw in my life."

Mr. Mathews rubbed his hands in irrepressible glee.

"I must say, Mr. King, that I am very glad to hear you say so," he replied; "I did not like to begin saying too much about his good looks myself, because you know it is so natural that a grandfather should feel rather partial, and I must take care not to get quizzed upon that score. But I won't deny that it is a great pleasure to me to hear you both speak so kindly of him."

"Where did he come from last, Mathews?" said Mr. King, innocently, and quite unconscious that there was anything awkward in the question.

"I believe,—that is to say,—I don't quite know for certain; but I fancy he is come from somewhere in the West Indies."

"Oh! the West Indies was it?" repeated Mr. King. "Well, it does not much matter about that, Mathews; let him come from whence he will, he has contrived to find his way to the right place, for there's no doubt that you may be able to get him some sort of situation or other, in which he may maintain himself respectably. He seems to have very good manners, I think."

"Why yes, Sir, I can't say that I see much room to find fault," replied the very decidedly delighted Mr. Mathews; who, notwithstanding all his efforts to restrain his satisfaction within decent bounds, could not have looked much more delighted had

the youth been his legitimate grandson, and the unquestioned heir of a long line of noble ancestors, both on the mother's and the father's side.

Nevertheless he was not altogether insensible to the possibility that Mrs. Mathews, and Mrs. Mathews' father might view the connection in a somewhat different light ; and after meditating silently upon this possibility for a minute or two, he determined upon proceeding with great caution. He had already, indeed, completely made up his mind that he would at once acknowledge the relationship to the whole neighbourhood ; being *now* very decidedly of opinion—whatever might have been the case before he had seen Stephen Cornington—that the circumstances of his birth were by no means of sufficient consequence to prevent his confessing, both with pride and pleasure, that he was the grandfather of so very splendidly handsome a youth. In a word, his thoughts were upon the whole very pleasant thoughts ; nor was his recollection of the timely, or as he was quite ready to call it, the providential change in his marriage settlement, the least agreeable of his cogitations. Why his wife had so vehemently wished for the alteration, he had never been able to comprehend, for he was fully aware of her advantage over him as to the chance of survivorship. But, whatever had been the cause, he blessed it ; and so happy was the state of his mind, that instead of being only ready to

“Bless every one possess'd of aught to give,”

he felt more strongly impelled still to bless the newly-found individual who was come so admirably *apropos* to receive.

But notwithstanding his measureless contentment at this evening's important adventure, he soon became extremely impatient to bring this said evening to its close, for he wished very ardently to find himself alone. In fact, he had as yet but very imperfectly made himself acquainted with the contents of Madame Briot's letter ; and though the important statement that the bearer of it was his grandson was very clearly announced in the very first line of her epistle, he was still quite ignorant of what might be the young man's hopes and objects in coming to him.

Now the handsome nuptial chamber of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews possessed the convenient addition of two dressing-rooms. By far the largest of these, the lady, in consideration of the completely separate establishment which she enjoyed by the posses-

sion of her den, had arranged for the separate use and benefit of her husband ; and there it was that he was now longing to find himself, for there it was that he knew he could safely abandon himself to the private perusal of Madame Briot's letter.

But his wit failed him utterly when he attempted to find, or to invent, some plausible excuse for retreating to this sacred apartment somewhat earlier than usual. It was in vain that he hinted to Mr. King the great propriety of his retiring to rest rather earlier than usual, on account of the sudden surprise which had come upon them ; the old gentleman declared himself to be all the better for it ; till at length, while it still wanted a full half-hour to ten, which was the family hour for going to bed, Mr. Mathews took courage, and suddenly rising and walking to a side-table, seized upon a bed-candle, and exclaimed—

“ Well, my good friends ! I don't know how you may feel after being so startled, but I confess that I long to be in my own little dressing-room, that I may think it all over quietly.”

“ Good nights ” were then exchanged, and Mr. Mathews, mounting the stairs with all convenient speed, found the profound retirement he wished for, and moreover, a bright fire to cheer him.

He shut the door and he locked it, for he felt a considerable degree of reluctance to running any risk of being surprised in the act of reading the letter which his grandson had brought him from the *ci-devant* Patty Cornington, of Vauxhall memory ; and being thus protected he sat down, and read as follows :—

“ MY DEAR AND NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN MR. MATHEWS.—I hope you have done justice, Sir, to the motives which for so many years have caused me to avoid all correspondence and all intercourse with you. The excellent young man who will, I trust, be able to deliver this into your hands, is your grandson, Mr. Mathews, and as such I will not and cannot doubt he will be received by you as one dear to your heart, as well as near to you in blood. Surely the sight of him will be enough to warm your heart, Mr. Mathews, for neither you nor anybody else will be able to deny that he is one of the noblest looking young fellows that ever a grandfather looked upon. His poor father, our son, alas ! is dead. It was a dreadful loss to me, Mr. Mathews, for he, too, was one that any parent might have been proud of—and oh ! so very like you, Sir !

"But I must not dwell upon that sort of thing ; it is not right in any way. But to come back to the subject of our dear grandson, it is but right that I should tell you, before I confide him to your care, that he has been brought up with the hope of being able to live as a gentleman, for his father, poor fellow, had every likelihood of doing very well in the world and of leaving his son so as to do well after him. But in this country, Mr. Mathews, there is no answering for anything. A man that is rich to-day is poor to-morrow ; and this has been the case with our son. So that he was in no way to be blamed for having given Stephen an education, which, to say truth, makes him fitter to be your grandson than mine.

"I need not be afraid to tell you that he is very, very clever indeed, for you won't know him long without finding that out. I have not forgotten what you were, Mr. Mathews, nor ever shall, Sir, however wrong it may be to remember it. Stephen is wonderfully like you in many things. His hands are so like yours, excepting that they are rather longer, that I could almost fancy that they were your own. And so they are your own. Arn't they, Sir ? And in his cleverness he is like you too ; but in addition to your superior mind, he has got a lot of accomplishments that might do honour to any gentleman's son in the world. He is a first-rate musicianer, and can play upon anything from a Jew's-harp to an organ. I do trust you will be proud of him, Mr. Mathews, and I can't help adding, Sir, that I think you ought. He speaks French, and Spanish too, as if he had been born in those countries ; nor is he far behind anybody here in making pictures of every face he sees, and they are almost as like as if you saw the people's faces in a glass, only his merry young heart will sometimes mix up such a deal of fun with his pictures, that he dares not show them to the people they are done for, or they would be fit to kill him for laughing at them.

"And, to tell the truth, this last is the reason why we have not set him upon getting his bread by his pictures, but the people are afraid of him I believe. But if you, Mr. Mathews, will take to him, as a gentleman of fortune ought to take to his grandson, he won't have no need of any of his accomplishments to live by. The use of them should only be to make you proud of him. And now, Sir, hoping that you will do your duty to this fine young man that any lord in the land might be proud to own as a grandson, I take my leave, not asking any greater favour to myself, though once you seemed to think so much of

me, than that you would be kind to one who ought to be dear to us both. I remain your always loving and

“Obedient servant,

“MARTHA BRIOT.”



## CHAPTER XIV

THIS letter, long as it was, was read deliberately twice through before Mr. Mathews thought of going to bed ; and it would very probably have been read a third time, had he not recollected that his wife might be surprised and puzzled by his prolonged absence. But there was really no need for him to read it a third time ; it had already made an impression on him too strong to be easily effaced.

Yet, nevertheless, he felt that he had by no means had enough of it, and though quite conscious of the propriety, not to say necessity, of going immediately to bed, he did not do so till he had carefully replaced the letter in its cover, and locked it up in a particularly safe little *secretaire* which was one among the many neat little commodities which he had brought with him when he was installed at Weldon Grange.

The key of this hung at his watch chain, and his watch and appendages were ever and always accommodated for the night in a particularly safe nook behind his pillow. So he lay down in peace as to the security of the (only) too interesting document which he had received.

Its effect upon him was very great, and upon the whole, very agreeable. Mr. Mathews was a very good sort of man in a small way ; that is to say, he had no great qualities, either good or evil. He had kind and friendly feelings towards all his fellow-creatures, but would have been incapable of demonstrating this by any act that required strength of mind, or firmness of character.

With one single exception his mind had no prominent, or predominating characteristic, but that one exception would have appeared strongly marked to any acute observer, if any such could have found interest in the investigation. But, in fact, no

one did feel interest in investigating the mind of Mr. Mathews, and consequently nobody was fully aware how sensitive he was on all points that either soothed or wounded his VANITY.

Of pride he had not an atom. Any approach to overbearing insolence towards the very lowest of his fellow creatures, was a feeling totally unknown to him; but he was vain—extremely vain, keenly, sensitively vain; and yet, poor man, unlike the generality of his fellow-mortals, who for the most part are exceedingly thankful when their little human failings are overlooked, Mr. Mathews would have felt nothing but mortification could he have been made to comprehend that nobody had the slightest suspicion of his being vain, because nobody had ever thought his harmless little character worth the trouble of examination.

Not even his wife had the slightest notion of the fact; and when she had occasionally observed him to be rather dainty about his dress, she invariably gave him credit for being so painfully conscious of his age, as to make him scrupulously attentive to render his appearance as favourable as possible.

She was the last woman in the world likely to fancy herself young at fifty; nevertheless she was quite aware that the fifteen years' seniority of her husband was more than was desirable, and was very good humouredly anxious that he should not himself think too much about it.

But her anxiety on this head was altogether superfluous. Mr. Mathews knew perfectly well that his wife was a plain woman, and he pitied her for it, because he knew perfectly well also how very pleasant it was to be conscious of being handsome. The very excess of his inordinate self-admiration of his own person positively prevented the folly from being understood, or appreciated. It would have been very difficult to persuade any of his acquaintances that he really thought himself, even at the time of his marriage, one of the handsomest men that ever lived. Yet so it was, and the sight of the newly-arrived Stephen Cornington, radiant in youthful comeliness, was more pleasurable to him than it would be easy for language to express, from the firm conviction that all the neighbourhood would see in him a most admirable resemblance of himself.

He had already occasionally indulged himself by hinting to various individuals in the neighbourhood, at what *he had been* in the days of his early youth; and now the idea that first took possession of him after the first surprise of this unexpected arrival had subsided, was, that as long as his grandson remained

near him, it would be easy enough for every one to form a correct idea of what he had been himself at the same age.

It was upon this thought that he went to sleep, and it was with this thought that he awoke in the morning.

But the vanity of good Mr. Mathews was of a purely individual and personal character ; it did not extend an inch beyond his well-made, well-preserved, well-dressed person.

One proof of this was that when meditating before he went to sleep upon this most interesting occurrence, he felt very nervous as to the possibility that his wife, or his wife's father, might object to the young man's remaining with them. It never occurred to him that he might himself have an influential vote on the subject. His only hope was that his wife would be unable to deny him anything if he only made himself as agreeable to her as he was quite sure he could do. He had no hope whatever from his authority, but a great deal from the tender passion with which he felt quite sure he had inspired her.

He no more comprehended the real motives which had led Mr. King to propose their marriage, and his daughter to assent to it, than a child of three years old might have done. His notion was that the wish for their union had originated entirely with the daughter, and in this he certainly saw nothing very extraordinary.

Such being his view of the case, it was very natural that he should consider a little tender attention on his part as the most effectual means of inducing his wife to second his views, and he was quite determined that this should not be wanting.

He was conscious, however, that there were peculiarities in the character of Mrs. Mathews, and he was conscious, too, that he did not quite understand them, though he was not wholly without a sort of theory on the subject ; and this theory suggested the notion that the singularities of Mrs. Mathews probably arose from her having suffered a good deal in her mind before she had taken courage to open her heart to her father on the subject of her attachment to him.

There were indeed moments in which it had occurred to him as possible that Miss Mary King, in common with a great many other young ladies, had in some degree lost her reason while struggling with her passion, and her extraordinary love of solitude was the feature which most forcibly suggested this idea.

He was thankful, however, that the malady showed itself in nothing more striking, or inconvenient, and he had quite made

up his mind to think that his most judicious course would be never to interfere with this, nor ever even to mention it.

He still, indeed, continued to be of the same opinion on this point; but nevertheless he felt called upon, having so very important an object in view, to address himself to the sentiment which, let it take what form it would, he was quite sure was predominant in her heart, in order to make her feel that she might hope for the very tenderest return of love from him, if her conduct towards his nephew was such as he wished it to be.

Fully persuaded of the correctness of his views upon the subject, Mr. Mathews quitted his dressing-room in excellent good time to ensure his being ready to receive his grandson upon his coming down stairs the next morning, and not without the hope of being able to say a few words to him, privately, before the business of breakfast began.

Nor was he disappointed, for the first thing he saw on descending to the hall was the figure of Mr. Stephen Cornington dressed precisely as he had been on the preceding evening, but with his beautiful curling hair combed, brushed, and arranged à ravir. The delighted old gentleman paused for a moment to watch him, as he stood with his back towards the staircase, earnestly looking, as it seemed, through the open door of the best drawing-room, which was a much better and brighter-looking apartment than the one he had seen the evening before.

At length, however, the young gentleman turned round, and coloured as he met the eye of his proud and happy grandfather.

"Oh, dear Sir! is that you?" he exclaimed in a voice expressive of great pleasure; "I have been looking about for you everywhere, for I don't know how long."

"Have you, my dear boy?" returned Mr. Mathews; "and you have found me at last, then, haven't you?"

"Yes, Sir, I have, thank God! And thankful I am for it, Heaven knows. There is something so venerable, so full of protection in the title of grandfather, that from the moment I first heard you mentioned by my poor dear grandmother I have been longing to get within reach of you; but, for all that, I never guessed what a cherishing, loving, and lovable face I should get sight of when I did get at you. Let me kiss your hand, grandfather. Upon my soul, I feel as if I could kneel down and kiss your feet! But I ought to be ashamed of myself, Sir; ought I not, for feeling so much pleasure at looking at you, merely because you are handsome?"

This observation from young Stephen Cornington might have been advantageously listened to by a great many old gentlemen, as a proof of the great importance of dressing themselves with care and good taste. It never would have entered Stephen Cornington's head to call old Mr. Mathews handsome, had not the peculiar care bestowed upon his toilet suggested it ; for this not only set off his well-preserved good looks to the best possible advantage, but showed in the most agreeable manner that he was not yet old enough to be indifferent upon the subject. The grandfather certainly looked at the grandson with a degree of satisfaction that seemed to increase at every glance ; and the conviction that it would quite break his heart if he were obliged to part with him took very strong possession of his mind.

The operations of Mr. Mathews' mind were not in general very rapid, but they were more than usually so at present, for it took him wonderfully little time to conceive, arrange, and even act upon the notion that the only way of securing the continuance of Stephen at Weldon Grange, would be the making Mrs. Mathews as fond of him as he was prepared to be himself.

The first result of this unwonted vivacity of mind was his opening the glass door which gave access to the garden from the hall, and the passing his arm under that of his admired descendant, giving him to understand that he was to accompany him through it, notwithstanding the obvious fact that breakfast was ready, which was made manifest by the passing of a servant carrying a coffee-pot upon a waiter into the room opposite.

"I must say five words to you, my dear Stephen, before we go into the breakfast-room," said he, walking rapidly in a direction contrary to that which would have placed them in sight of the said breakfast-room windows.

"We won't keep them waiting half a moment, Stephen. But it is very necessary, very necessary indeed, that I should make you understand, at once, how very important it is that you should make yourself agreeable to Mrs. Mathews."

"If you tell me that it is your wish, my dear Sir, that will be quite enough to make me earnestly try to do so," replied the handsome youth earnestly

"Why, the case is this, Stephen : I have married quite lately, you know, a lady of very good fortune ; indeed, I may fairly say an heiress, which, considering that I am no longer quite so young as I have been, shows that I am not altogether a stupid man, Stephen. But the lady, as you may perceive, is not very young any more than myself, and therefore you know it would

be quite nonsense for me to think anything about having heirs, and that is one reason, I suppose, why I am so well pleased to see you, my dear boy, though, to be sure, you are not quite an heir in the regular way. But your manner and appearance please me, Stephen. I can't help fancying that you are very like what I once was myself."

"My dear mother—that is, my dear grandmother, who has in truth ever been a mother to me—my dear grandmother always said I was the image of you," said the young man, fixing his eyes upon the face of Mr. Mathews with a mixture of tenderness and respect that was very touching.

"Yes, I think so, I think so," replied the old gentleman, pressing the arm which rested upon his. "And all this you know, Stephen, makes it very natural that I should not feel altogether displeased at the idea of having you with me. I am not a rich man, my dear Stephen. If I had been, I have no doubt that I should have done more for your grandmother than I have done. But the truth is I could not do it without injuring myself. I had just enough to enable me to live like a gentleman in a much smaller house than this, but no more. But things are improved in that respect, now, my dear boy. Mrs. Mathews was, as I have told you, an heiress, and, of course, I cannot but feel that I have been a fortunate man to win the affections of a lady so circumstanced, at a period of life much later, I believe, than it is usual for such things to happen. It is a great thing, Stephen, when one is past sixty—and I am past sixty—for a man to keep his own close carriage, with a thoroughly good, handsome pair of coach-horses, real, proper coach-horses, to draw it. It is a great thing—a very important thing—whether in town or country, it really is a very important thing—a great deal more so, Stephen, than any good looks could be in a lady turned fifty. I say all this, my dear boy, to make you understand that Mrs. Mathews is a person of great and real importance. If you are as quick-witted as you are bright-eyed, Stephen (I certainly can't help seeing that your eyes are very like mine), and if you are as quick-witted as I hope to find you, it will not be your fault if you do not stand well with Mrs. Mathews. And now, one word more, and we will go in to breakfast. You must keep it in your mind, Stephen, that I am not the only master of Weldon Grange as yet. Mr King, my wife's father, is still the master of the property, and a clever old man he is, too, in matters of business. But, for all that, Mrs. Mathews can turn him round her finger ;

and if you can but contrive to make her wish that you should remain here, Weldon Grange may be your home to the end of your days, for anything I can see to the contrary. And now then we will go in to breakfast."

The only answer made by the young man was the seizing the hand of Mr. Mathews as he withdrew it from his arm, and affectionately pressing it to his lips.

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## CHAPTER XV

It would have been difficult to trace in the radiant benignity of the beautiful smile with which the young Stephen Cornington greeted Mrs. Mathews, any feeling less genuine and fresh from the heart than that of pleasure at meeting again in the morning the hostess who had so kindly provided for his comfort during the night.

And assuredly there was no symptom that Mrs. Mathews either saw or suspected any deeper motive in it, for she only waited till she had completed the sundry little special preparations for her father's comfort, which had been her morning task for the last thirty-six years of her life, in order to receive his offered hand with the most perfect civility.

And yet Mrs. Mathews was by no means the sort of person to approve the establishing a diurnal habit of hand-shaking with any individual as likely as she thought Mr. Mathews' grandson seemed to be, of making a visit of some continuance in the house. One proof of which was, that when Mr. Mathews himself attempted to follow the affectionate example of the young man, and with newly-awakened tenderness laid one hand upon her shoulder while he extended the other to invite the approach of hers, she only turned round towards him, and said, looking assiduously among the breakfast preparations which covered the table, "Do you want anything, Mr. Mathews?"

The aspect of the venerable master of the mansion was as hospitably kind in the morning as it had been at night; and as he looked in the handsome face of his stranger guest, he said, with very cordial good-humour, "Good morning, Sir, good morning. I hope you have rested well?"

"You must not call him SIR! You must not, indeed, my dear Mr King!" said the greatly exhilarated Mr. Mathews, who seemed to imbibe fresh courage, as well as fresh tenderness, with every glance he took at the youthful Cornington. "If he is my grandson, Sir, he must, of course, be your great-grandson, you know, and, therefore, if you please, you must always call him Stephen."

And hereupon Mr. Mathews laughed vehemently, conscious that he had said something that was really very witty, and very judicious at the same time.

He looked at his wife, and if he had met her eye the look would have melted, like butter exposed to the sun, into something suggestive of excessive softness. But Mrs. Mathews looked only at the coffee-cups, and that look had very much the same expression as the look of a person stone deaf might have had.

Mrs. Mathews was no great talker at meals. At least, since her marriage she had permitted the talk to be chiefly between the two gentlemen, for they had always something to say to each other, either about the farm or the horses; so there was nothing particular in her being pretty nearly silent now, especially as their newly arrived visitor seemed to be endowed both with the will and the power of talking in the most animated manner, and to any extent.

Mr. Mathews listened to him with the most evident delight; but yet he was greatly too much occupied by his own thoughts to know very well what the young man was talking about. All he knew and clearly understood was that he was there, and that he was a perfect model of youthful, manly beauty, and that the only way to keep him there, would be by his exerting all his own influence—and he most conscientiously believed he had very much—to induce Mrs. Mathews to wish for this, for his sake, as ardently as he did himself. But at length the long meal was over, and then Mrs. Mathews was out of sight in a moment.

There was nothing paltry or pitiful, and very little that was really churlish, in the character or temper of my heroine; but, nevertheless, when she had fairly fastened herself inside her den, she began to question herself as to the desirability of always, and for ever, having such a very chatty young gentleman as Master Stephen Cornington, as a resident member of the family.

It did not appear to her that it was desirable. She was fully aware of the interesting fact that he was, beyond all compa-

rison, the handsomest young man she had ever seen ; she was aware, too, that his manners were amiable and obliging, and she was much too good a physiognomist to doubt that he was good humoured.

But, in despite of all this, she did not relish the idea of his becoming one of the family ; and Mrs. Mathews, after she had formed a decided opinion on any subject, was very little likely to act in contradiction to it. Neither was she at all in the habit of permitting the will of any person at Weldon Grange to interfere greatly with her own.

Nevertheless, in direct opposition both to her judgment and her inclination, Stephen Cornington did become, and immediately too, a member of the Weldon Grange family.

It would be useless to bestow many words in relating the ways and means by which this was brought about, because a very few will suffice to explain it.

Mr. Stephen Cornington became a member of the Weldon Grange family, because Mary King, just about twenty-two years before, fell in love with John Anderson.

There was an odd sort of coincidence as to the time and manner in which this long-passed and little-suspected adventure produced this very important effect on the fortunes of Stephen Cornington.

Mrs. Mathews, though surrounded by many tempting volumes, opened none of them that morning as she sat in "her secret bower," after her retreat from the breakfast table ; for she was holding council with herself, not as to the question of whether she should oppose the domiciliation of the young man, or not oppose it, for that point was already fully decided ; but as to the manner in which the process of ejection should be performed. The subject was not without difficulty, for she very sincerely wished to avoid offending any of the parties concerned ; but the only really practical solution of them all must be found, as she speedily felt convinced, in her own firmness of purpose and stedfast resolution of having her own way.

And to this point she had reached when the door was opened by the chastened Sally Spicer, who entered the den with a letter in her hand.

The arrival of a letter was a rare occurrence at Weldon Grange, and no sooner had Mrs. Mathews caught sight of it than she held out her hand with considerable impatience to receive it. Old Sally quickened her step, and laid it on the table before her mistress, who gave her a nod which made her

retreat at her best speed, and lose no time in closing the door behind her.

Greatly as Mrs. Mathews had been disappointed at receiving no further tidings from Madras, and repeatedly as she had told herself of late that she never should, for that doubtless, John Anderson's orphan girl had found some more promising way of disposing of herself, she no sooner caught sight of the letter than with a sort of impetuosity of spirit, which made a prominent feature in her character, she felt very nearly as certain as if she had already opened it that it was the identical letter she had been so long expecting.

It was sealed with black, too; so before she opened it she knew for certain that John Anderson existed no longer, save in the person of his young daughter. But his farewell letter had too effectually prepared her for this, for any feeling, of being shocked or surprised, to interfere with the eager interest with which she read the following epistle :

"In complying with my dear father's last wishes, and in obeying his last orders, I cannot doubt that I am doing right; and it is this, dear madam, which must plead my excuse for applying for counsel and assistance to a stranger. But though his wishes and commands are, and ought to be, the laws by which I guide myself when thus addressing you, I cannot but feel that these wishes and commands were communicated to me by my dying father under the firm persuasion, on his part, that he was asking your friendship for one who, though an orphan, was by no means destitute. Not many hours before he breathed his last, he told me that the principal partner of the banking concern, to which he has belonged during all his commercial life, had just left him, and had told him that though the accounts of the partnership, which had been for some weeks under examination, were not yet finally settled, he had the satisfaction of assuring him that there would unquestionably be a balance of several thousand pounds in his favour; enough, in short, to set his mind perfectly at rest on the subject of my future independence.

"And notwithstanding all that has followed, it is a comfort to me to know that his mind *was* perfectly at rest, and that he died as all must wish that those they love may die.

"Mr. Moxley, the gentleman who had tranquillized his last hours by giving him this assurance, was himself, as he has repeatedly assured me since, very sincerely convinced of the truth of it. He is an excellent and most truly kind-hearted

man, and had he the means he would, I am very sure, prevent my ever suffering from the unfortunate termination of the examination that was going on at the time of my dear father's death.

"I am too profoundly ignorant to be capable of forming any opinion as to the causes which led to the catastrophe which has made the firm bankrupt, and left me destitute; all I know is, that the insolvency has arisen from the connection of Mr. Moxley's bank with some mercantile speculation in a distant part of the world, and it was this circumstance which caused the long delay in the final settlement of the accounts.

"Thus then, dear madam, instead of your friendly notice being asked for by the well-portioned daughter of an old friend, you are now receiving a petition for your charitable assistance in finding some occupation that may furnish the means of existence to a young girl, who has very little to boast of, which may assist her to help herself, save an earnest wish to do what is right, and a most sincere willingness to exert whatever power she has of being useful.

"My education has been as carefully attended to as circumstances would admit; but my dear father was so strongly persuaded that my breathing mountain air was absolutely necessary to ensure my health, that I have rarely had the advantage of such lessons as might be found in the city. The governess, who kindly remained with me till the day of my departure, though impatiently waited for in the family where she has engaged herself, is a German, and a clever, as well as a very amiable woman, and by her I have been taught what, as I hope, may enable me to take the place of a governess myself to young children. Unfortunately I am too young to propose offering my assistance to any others; and it is to assist me in obtaining this that I now venture to petition for your kindness. Should you, however, think, dear madam, that it is presumption in one so young to hope to obtain the situation of governess, I should, without hesitation, yield to your opinion, and would in that case readily and gratefully avail myself of your interest to obtain the situation of nursery-maid in any family where there was an upper nurse, whose superintendence would prevent my want of experience from being hurtful.

"Meanwhile I will not attempt to conceal from you that my situation is a very painful one. My kind friend, Mr. Moxley, though he unexpectedly finds himself in a situation that must of necessity check the liberal kindness of his temper, most

generously forced upon me the loan of ten pounds beyond the expenses of my passage to England (which expenses, as well as those arising from my dear father's last illness and funeral, were provided for by the sale of his household furniture), and nearly the whole of this ten pounds remains in my purse. By the advice of the captain, who undertook the charge of me during the voyage, I have placed myself in a little lodging in John-street, London Docks, No. 5, and it is there that I shall await your answer, dear madam.

"If it would be more easy to obtain for me the place of nursery-maid than that of governess, I think it would be better for me to begin with that first, for I fear nothing so greatly as the finding my money gone before I have secured the means of getting more. I will not add anything as to the anxiety with which I shall await for a reply to this letter, which I know it must be a very painful thing to receive. Neither will I attempt any apology for writing it, for I do not think my father would have so earnestly enjoined me to do so had he not known you well enough, dear madam, to be very sure that you would not be angry with me.

"I remain truly and obediently yours,  
"JANET ANDERSON."

Deeply still was the attention with which Mrs. Mathews perused this letter. To look at her one might have almost thought she had ceased to breathe; not a movement of any kind was perceptible. One might have fancied that the process necessary to the possessing herself of the contents was some holy rite, which the slightest sound or movement would interrupt and render abortive.

But during the moments that this strange stillness continued, the activity of her mind seemed to be in exact proportion to the repose of her body. Visions of the future opened before her with such vivid distinctness that all things actually present appeared to fade away, and become airy nothings in comparison. She was no longer childless. She was no longer a solitary thing, passing onward through life without object and without motive of sufficient importance to be so called for anything she did, or for anything she purposed to do. Her steady loving attention to her father was as spontaneous as the act of going to sleep; and as to her studies, they were not only, with all their magic charm for her, as lawful as eating, but as much a matter of course also.

But now all the conditions of her existence seemed suddenly changed. This child, this daughter of John Anderson, who had hitherto only appeared to her as a distant object, full of interest, indeed, but so indistinctly seen as to produce something more like the vagueness of doubt than the brightness of hope, as she contemplated it, was now distant no longer. In palpable reality the child of John Anderson was within a few hours' reach; and better still, oh! greatly better still, she was waiting for permission to approach her as eagerly as a child might long for a summons from its mother.

It was impossible, surely, that Mary King could be glad because the child of John Anderson was in poverty and sorrow. And yet, when Mrs. Mathews at length perceived that tears were very actively chasing each other down her cheeks, she could scarcely have honestly denied that they were tears of joy. At any rate it is most indisputably certain that Mrs. Mathews was happier at that moment than she had ever felt before in the whole course of her life.

And as she gradually and reasonably became aware of this, she wiped her eyes, and set herself steadily to consider in what manner she should commence the operations which her new state of existence rendered necessary.

Janet Anderson was at No. 5, John-street, London Docks.

“And how am I to get her thence? How am I to bring her HOME?” were the questions which Mrs. Mathews now asked herself. Mrs. Mathews was a married woman; and moreover she was still living in her father’s house, and not in her own; nevertheless it never occurred to her that there was, or possibly could be, any difficulty as to her immediately adopting Janet Anderson as her child; on this point she was thoroughly incapable of conceiving a doubt; for though she never, perhaps, stated the fact explicitly to her own mind, she had a quiet consciousness within her that *her* way would be *the* way in which all important matters would be managed at Weldon Grange.

Her only difficulty, and her only doubt, was concerning the manner in which her purposes were to be made known and put into execution. Not, indeed, that Mrs. Mathews had the slightest intention of announcing to any one, not even to Sally Spicer, that she intended instantly to adopt Janet Anderson, and to consider her and treat her as a daughter so long as they both should live.

There would be no advantage in announcing this, because it was a fact that would announce itself more satisfactorily to

all parties by the course of events than by any spoken declaration of purpose.

But how should she set about informing her father and her husband that she intended immediately to set off for London (for such was the resolution she had come to on that part of the subject), in order to escort Miss Janet Anderson to Weldon Grange, where she was to find the "Red Room" in apple-pie order to receive her?

Mrs. Mathews would have felt a greater degree of contempt for herself than it would have been easy for her to endure, had she for a single instant permitted herself to doubt her being able to act exactly in the manner she intended and chose to do; but she was really, for the most part, a very well-bred, well-behaved lady, and had as little inclination for everything approaching altercation as any lady could have.

Even the discussion of any measure which she had determined on was disagreeable to her, and it was for this reason that she now condescended, very deliberately, to consult her judgment as to the easiest and civilest mode of proceeding.

Nor had she thus employed herself for many seconds before one very obvious course of action suggested itself as a sure and certain means of arranging everything she wished, as far as her husband was concerned. She felt quite sure that she had only to submit with a good grace to the occupation of the "Blue Room" by Miss Cornington's grandson, in order to secure the appropriation of the red one to John Anderson's daughter.

As to her good and ever gentle father, it would have been little better than affectation, had Mrs. Mathews bestowed a thought upon any opposition she might be likely to receive from him. She knew perfectly well that there was no danger, either on this, or on any other point, that she should meet with opposition from him. All her meditations, therefore, were speedily fixed upon the question of how best to announce to her husband the startling fact that she was on the eve of making an excursion to London for the purpose of bringing back with her a young lady, who from thenceforward was to be considered as a member of the family.

Mrs. Mathews always went down stairs for luncheon, in order to satisfy herself that her father was taken good care of at that, to him, very important little meal; and it was at luncheon time that she intended to electrify her husband by the flattering proposal of taking a little walk with him in the shrubbery.

On looking at her watch she was a good deal surprised to find that three hours had already melted away under the process of meditation upon the blessed event that had befallen her, and it was only then that she recollects that the hours which were gliding away so smoothly for her, in this delightful occupation, were passed by her already dearly-beloved Janet in all the misery of suspense and doubt.

As yet, however, she had lost no time, for she had missed no post ; and as she did not intend that her first letter to Janet should be a very long one, she knew that there would still be abundance of time to write her letter and dispatch it to the post before she could be wanted down stairs.

It is probable, I believe, that most married ladies if about to announce to their lord and master an event so important as that of inviting a young unknown lady to come and live with them, would have written the invitation after making the announcement, instead of before it, but such was not the case with Mrs. Mathews.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

THE following letter was therefore written, and dispatched by Sally Spicer to the Weldon post-office nearly half an hour before it was necessary for Mrs. Mathews to descend to the dinner-parlour for luncheon.

“ MY VERY DEAR JANET ANDERSON,—Had I nothing but my own inclination to consult, I should not now be writing this letter to you, but I should be going myself towards the railroad station in order to get to you as speedily as possible. But I cannot be quite so rapid in my movements as I would wish to be. You will find that both my father and my husband are quite old men, my dear Janet ; and that, compared to you, I am not very young myself, and old people are not so rapid in their movements as young ones ; nevertheless, I flatter myself that I shall be with you before you have had time enough to accuse me of being very slow. You must, I am afraid, my dear, be very uncomfortable at finding yourself alone in a new country,

and a strange house ; but keep up your spirits, Janet ; you will soon be in your new home, and if you are not happy there, it will not be the fault of your father's old friends. I flatter myself that nothing will prevent my setting off for London by the early train to-morrow, and if I can do this you will see me before twelve o'clock. And now, good-bye, my dear child. Do not fancy that in coming to my father and me you are coming among strangers. Such people as your father, Janet, do not quite leave this world when they die ; a portion of their spirit is left behind them, and lives still in the memory of those who loved them, and in coming to my good father and to me, you are coming to people who cherish every memorial of him with sincere affection. Can you doubt then that we shall cherish you ? Farewell till to-morrow

"Your affectionate friend,  
"MARY MATHEWS."

Having sealed and dispatched this epistle, which it really required a strong effort on her part to make so short, Mrs. Mathews went down stairs, and the first person she saw was her husband, who was standing at the open garden door, looking out upon the lawn, now bright in April sunshine, where his handsome grandson was amusing himself by making a little pet spaniel belonging to Mr. King leap repeatedly over a stick.

Mr. Mathews rushed towards her the moment she appeared, with an eagerness of welcome to which it was impossible that she could be insensible.

"Oh, dear me ! how I have been wishing for you !" he exclaimed ; "it has been the very prettiest thing you ever saw in your life—the seeing Stephen play with Frisk ! Do begin again, Stephen ! Do my dear boy let Mrs. Mathews see him run round and round after you, as you made him do just now !"

But Mrs. Mathews did not seem inclined to enjoy the sport, for she did not look smilingly as she replied, "The seeing Frisk run round and round has nothing very new in it, Mr. Mathews, by way of an amusement, and my father's basin of soup will get cold, I am afraid, if we stay here, for I saw it carried in as I came down stairs."

"Stephen ! Stephen ! my dear boy, come this moment ! I beg your pardon, my dear love, a thousand times over for detaining you !" and so saying, Mr. Mathews playfully passed

his arm under that of his lady, and in that affectionate attitude escorted her into the parlour.

Mrs. Mathews understood it all perfectly, and perhaps she was not altogether displeased. She saw that she was to be coaxed into permitting the newly-found grandson to remain where he was, till his admiring grandfather had enjoyed a good deal more of his company. Had no tidings of the orphan daughter of John Anderson reached her by that day's post, she would have beheld all these affectionate demonstrations on the part of her husband with very different feelings. As it was, she thanked her good stars for the happy coincidence which had brought these two new claimants upon Weldon Grange hospitality so fortunately together. Had either of them appeared singly, there might have been difficulties; now the good lady saw very distinctly that there would be none. But she had a part to play, and she did not much like that; for she had naturally a very strong inclination to be sincere, as well as successful, in all her dealings, and she winced a good deal at the idea of being obliged to simulate a wish for the continued society of the handsome Stephen, when in truth she would very greatly have preferred being without it.

The notion, too, that Mr. Mathews might go on taking her by the arm, and squeezing her hand whenever he could get hold of it, was exceedingly disagreeable to her, and it was absolutely necessary that the names "John Anderson" and "Janet," should be repeated pretty incessantly by her heart to enable her to "behave herself seemly" under all the indications of tenderness manifested towards her by her husband during the repast. Such and so great were they, that at last her temper, though not her purpose, broke down. She felt that it would be impossible, absolutely impossible, for her to simper and look pleased when her husband, with nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles, addressed her perpetually as "Mary dear!" and "sweet love!" She felt already that this would be too much for her strength, and considerably before the bright-eyed Stephen had made away with his second plateful of apple-pie, she had resolved to change her system of operations, and not to display herself before the eyes of John Anderson's daughter under false colours of any kind. It had been her purpose, during her projected *tête-à-tête* with her husband, to have led him to talk of his grandson, no very difficult task, as she suspected, and having gently brought him to disclose the wishes she had so plainly read for the young man's remaining with them, to

yield her consent very graciously, and then to have tested his notions as to reciprocal justice by stating the fact of Janet Anderson's arrival, and the strong inclination she felt to invite her also.

But this mode of achieving her object had become so distasteful to her from the superabundant sweetness which she felt would be the result of Mr. Mathews taking the initiative, that she determined to reverse the order of proceeding which she had first decided upon, and to perform the business she had to do without any unnecessary sweetness, or hypocrisy of any kind.

This change of purpose brought a great feeling of relief with it, and it was with a promptitude which showed no sort of dislike to the business she was upon, that she said to her husband, as the party rose from the table, "Give your arm to my father, Mr. Mathews. He is going to sit in the garden, and then come to me in the east walk. I want to speak to you."

If Mr. Mathews had been listening to airs from heaven as she thus spoke to him, he could not have looked more enchanted, which proved that he had considerable command over his features, for, to say the truth, he was in a terrible state of alarm, being strongly persuaded that his lady was going to say something about the sudden arrival of his grandson, which might be accompanied by such high-principled reflections on the unfortunate circumstances connected with his birth, as might render the delightful domestic arrangement which he had contemplated, extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible.

Nevertheless, there was evidently no choice left him as to keeping the assignation proposed, a fact of which she was herself most perfectly aware, and she accordingly set off, with no other protectors than her shawl and her parasol, to the place appointed. Nor had she remained there very long before she beheld Mr. Mathews approaching, for having placed Mr. King upon the favourite bench, he delayed no longer than was necessary to say to his grandson as he passed him, "Wait for me, Stephen, for five minutes, and I will show you a beautiful walk. Besides, my dear boy, it is likely enough that I may have something to say to you. I am going to speak to Mrs. Mathews for a few minutes, and I think it very likely that something may be said about you."

Nature had not been liberal only towards Stephen Cornington in the gift of personal beauty, she had endowed him also with a large share of acuteness. He only listened to his grandfather

with an air of docility, and replied, renewing at the same moment his gambols with Frisk, " You shall find me just about here, Sir, when you come back ; " but he understood perfectly well, though nobody would have guessed it that looked at him, that his own destiny would very probably be decided within the space of the next half hour.

But it took even less than that to bring the colloquy of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews to a conclusion.

She was hovering near the point at which she knew he would arrive, and having joined him, and declined his offered arm, she commenced the conversation thus :

" It is very likely, Mr. Mathews, that you may partly guess the subject on which I wish to speak to you, and therefore it will not be necessary for me to detain you by any long preface. I wish to speak to you on the subject of the young man who came upon us so very unexpectedly last night."

" No doubt of it, my dear. Of course it is no more than natural and proper that you should speak of it," he replied ; " and I wish very much to speak upon it too."

" Then pray *speak* upon it, Mr. Mathews ; " she briskly rejoined, " I shall be glad to hear what you have to say upon the subject."

" Why, my dear, the chief thing I have to say is that duty should be considered before all things. Now, it seems to me that, considering the near relationship, my first duty is to remember what is due by the laws of God and man from a grandfather to his grandson."

" Yes, that would be all very well, Mr. Mathews, only you know, in this case the laws do not authorize any man to call him your grandson," she rejoined.

" But nature is stronger than law, Mrs. Mathews ! " returned the gentleman very solemnly ; " and I hope I shall never be so wicked as to be deaf to its voice."

" And what does its voice dictate on the present occasion ? " replied the lady, with a tone a little approaching the ironical.

" It dictates to me, my dear, very plainly indeed, that it is my duty to treat the young man as what he really is, and that is, my grandson—the own son of my own son."

" Of your natural son, Mr. Mathews," said Mrs. Mathews in something like a whisper, but very distinctly.

" Well, my dear ! " returned her husband, whose high appreciation of himself did not rest solely on his consciousness of self-approving beauty," but who was conscious also of pos-

sessing a very considerable portion of wit, "Well, my dear ! his being natural, ought not to make me UN-natural, you know."

"No, Mr. Mathews, certainly not," she replied, with great equanimity, "neither ought it to make my father and myself unnatural either; and you have lived long enough in the world, Mr. Mathews, to be quite aware that it would be very unnatural if we were either of us to wish that an offspring from your connection with the female called Cornington should take up his abode among us, as a member of our family."

"It is on my devoted affection to you, my dearest love," returned Mr. Mathews, throwing as much tenderness as possible into his voice, and at the same time attempting to pass his arm around the lady's waist,—"it is on my devoted affection to you that I rest my hopes of obtaining your permission for doing what would make me so completely happy, as having this dear boy to stay with me."

The embrace was avoided by the unexpectedly rapid step in advance, which was at that moment made by Mrs. Mathews; but it required rather more deliberate consideration to enable her to answer her husband's claim upon her gratitude.

Her spirit, it cannot be denied, was a stubborn spirit, and would not permit her, though she had a great object in view, to say one single little civil syllable, though the doing so might have paved a smooth and easy path towards the point at which she was anxious to arrive.

But there was something in her nature that seemed to render this impossible; so she strode stoutly on for a step or two, her husband following her in a very nervous condition, notwithstanding his firm conviction that he had inspired a very tender passion in her breast; but he had been accustomed to hear from his very earliest youth of the rigorous severity of single ladies against those less correct than themselves; and he remembered at that terrible moment, with a distinctness that positively made him quake from head to foot, that HIS lady had long been single! And the sort of awe in which he stood of her (which no persuasion of her love could enable him entirely to overcome), rendered him, as he thought of this, absolutely incapable of resuming the conversation.

Mrs. Mathews, however, knowing that she had a great deal of important business on her hands, was by no means disposed to let this profitless silence continue, and she therefore suddenly turned round, and standing still, till her husband had overtaken her, she said,—

"It is impossible to change what is passed and gone, Mr. Mathews. Had I any such power I certainly would make many circumstances, connected with this young man, very different from what they are at present,—you can easily believe this, Sir, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, my dearest love! I can, indeed, and I am sure I only wish that I could change everything, so as to make it all exactly what you would most like and approve. But, you know, my dear,"—

"There is one thing; Mr. Mathews, that I certainly do know," replied his wife, interrupting him with very little ceremony; "I know that I will never consent to have my father's house, and my own manner of living turned over and over in the way you propose, unless I can have some whim of my own gratified to make up for it."

"You would find it quite impossible, utterly impossible, my dearest Mary, to propose anything agreeable to yourself that I should dream of opposing for a single moment. Only say,—only explain,"—

"Very well," she returned, again interrupting him; "you shall know all about it in a moment. I daresay you remember a letter that came here from India a few months ago, and that both my father and I, for some time after its arrival, were constantly expecting that it would be followed by a young lady,—the orphan child of an old friend of ours?"

"Oh dear, yes! my dear Mary," replied her husband, "I perfectly remember all about it."

"Her not coming," resumed Mrs. Mathews, "was a great disappointment to us, for we had a very sincere regard for her father; but so long a time has elapsed since the arrival of this letter, without our hearing anything further of Miss Anderson, that we concluded she had changed her plans, and that the next news we heard of her would be that she intended to remain in India. But, by a singular coincidence, Mr. Mathews, the news of her arrival in England travelled from London, as I think, by the very same conveyance which brought this young Mr. Cornington. Confident, as she well might be, from her father's knowledge of us, that she would be affectionately received by my good father and myself, she has merely written to tell me that she is awaiting my instructions in London, and these instructions of course will be that she should come to Weldon Grange immediately. And now, Mr. Mathews, I will deal very fairly with you. Had I not received this news as to

the arrival of Janet Anderson in England, I should most certainly have opposed the entrance of Martha Cornington's grandson as an inmate of my father's house, and as a member of my family. But I am willing to make a compromise with you. I think I should like to have a young friend and companion of my own sex, and I think it very probable that if this young lady be as deserving as I expect to find her, I may like to keep her with me till she is settled in life. That I may do this without any difficulty, or any suspicion of objection on your part, I will consent to your inviting this young man to remain with you as long as he shall conduct himself to our satisfaction, or till you shall have been able to find some situation in which he may advantageously occupy himself, and employ his talents to his own profit and advantage."

"That is all I ask, my dearest love," replied the delighted grandfather. "He has great talents, my dear Mary. I have it from the very best authority that he has very extraordinary talents, and of course my first object will be to put him in the way of profiting by them. That is all I ask for. Only give me an opportunity of enabling him to provide for himself. He will catch at it, as soon as it is offered : I am quite sure of that from the character I have received with him. And as to your young friend, my dear, it will be the very greatest honour and pleasure to me to behave to her like a father."

The sort of groan with which these last words were listened to was uttered in a very theatrical aside. The trees might have heard it, had they been a sentient audience, but the companion at her side was in no degree aware of it. And, as she made him no other reply, he resumed the discourse by saying,—

"Of course, my dear, this Indian young lady brings a large fortune with her,—all Indian young ladies do. We must take care of her, Mary, in every sense of the word, you know."

"Her fortune will be left in the hands of her Indian connections who have been appointed her trustees, I believe," replied Mrs. Mathews, rather stiffly, and with the air of a person who rejected the discussion of a subject upon which the individual addressed had no right to interfere.

"Well, well, we'll say no more about that then," returned the old gentleman, who was too happy to take offence at anything ;—"but I must go and find my dear boy. There will be some comfort in looking at him now. Good-bye, good-bye, my dear."

"You shall go this moment," returned his wife ; "I only wish

to tell you first, I mean to go to London by the early train tomorrow, to escort Miss Anderson to Weldon."

"To London, my dear! Are you really serious?—are you really going to set off for London? Somebody must go to take care of you, certainly. Would you like that Stephen and I should both accompany you? I dare say he would be delighted to go."

"I think it is very likely he might," replied Mrs. Mathews, stiffly, "but you should remember, Mr. Mathews, that it is possible I should not be delighted to have him. As a hint for the future, let me give you one bit of advice: If you wish that we should go on well together, you must take care that he never obtrudes himself upon me when he is not wanted. This is the only way to insure our continuing on good terms together. You know that my habits and manner of life are particularly independent."

"I know it, my dear, I know it!" replied Mr. Mathews, eagerly; you told me so from the very first. I beg your pardon a thousand times for forgetting all about it at that moment. Stephen shall be made to understand it, he shall indeed."

"Then everything will be right, and go on smoothly: and now you may go and find your grandson, and I will go and find my father."

And so saying, Mrs. Mathews turned aside towards the garden-seat on which her good father was sunning himself, and soon contrived to make him feel highly delighted at the idea of having poor John Anderson's little girl to be kind to.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

MR. MATHEWS also found his fondly-admired grandson; and their conversation was, in like manner, extremely satisfactory—but it was not carried on in the garden. Mr. Mathews knew that there was too much to hear and to say on both sides to render the garden a proper scene for the interview.

"Come with me into my own dressing-room, Stephen," said the old gentleman, as soon as he had secured the arm of his

volatile grandson, whom he again found gambolling with Frisk, with great apparent enjoyment.

Perhaps the young man thought that this was about the safest occupation he could choose till such time as he could obtain such a *carte du pays* as might enable him to judge what frolics he might safely play, and what it would be most discreet to leave alone.

It was with very ready and smiling acquiescence that he followed his grandfather to the snug retreat he had named; and it was with an eye that had some speculation in it that he looked round the comfortable, well-furnished room. He had already learned on the road that Mr. King was the owner of Weldon Lodge, and he made a bow to his grandfather in his heart, and gave him credit for being a very clever old gentleman for contriving to marry the heiress of such a place, and to get himself so very comfortably put up in it.

"Well, Sir," said the saucy boy, looking radiantly handsome as he smiled in the old man's face, and already not quite unconscious of the agreeable effect which his smiles produced on him, "it is certainly a pleasure after a long, tiresome voyage, to find such a grandfather as you are at the end of it, especially when he has got such a dressing-room for his own as this is."

"I suppose, then, my dear boy, you have not been much used to such handsome houses as Weldon Grange?" returned the grandfather, with a look and a tone that expressed a great deal of interest and some little curiosity. The boy returned the look, but it was playfully rather than gravely that he answered, after a moment's consideration, "Such a house as this, Sir! No, not exactly, because our houses in the West Indies are quite different from your houses in England. You have never been in the West Indies, have you, Sir?"

"No, my dear boy, no; I never have. I have been in France two or three times, but I have never been in the West Indies."

"Why, then, my dear grandfather, it is very difficult for me to make you understand the difference; but there is a difference, I assure you—a very great difference. But you must not think either, because I say so, that my dear, good grandmother, who has brought me up with as much care, I think, as if I was heir to the whole world (though I don't believe that she has a single shilling that she can leave me, dear soul)—you must not think, that because I say there is a difference, that our house is a shabby house, for I do assure you it is not. My dear grandmother has done her duty by me in every way."

"I'll tell you one thing, my dear fellow," said Mr. Mathews, looking at him very fondly; "one thing that your grandmother has done for you, is the giving you the inheritance of her own beautiful eyes. I never could have thought that one pair of eyes could be so like another pair of eyes as yours are to hers."

"I am glad"—replied the youth, in an altered voice, for there was nothing like gaiety left in it; "I am glad of that! for it may be one means of making you love me, my dear, dear grandfather!"

This sudden transition from playful gaiety to deep feeling affected Mr. Mathews very powerfully. For a moment he was quite incapable of speaking, but he held out his hand, and clasped that of his newly-found grandson with exceeding tenderness, and at length said:—

"You are right, my dear boy—quite right! you are like us both, Stephen, take my word for it, you are very like us both; and I certainly am not likely to love you the less for it. I dare say, now, that you have heard your poor dear grandmother say you were very like me—very like what I was, you know, as a young man; that is what I mean, of course?"

"Have I heard her say so?" exclaimed Stephen, ardently; "I have heard her say so, father, a thousand and a thousand times, while the tears ran down her cheeks, dear soul, as she thought of the days that were gone!"

Mr. Mathews pulled out his handkerchief, and pressed it to his eyes.

"Don't weep, dear father!" said the young man, tenderly taking his hand; "let me be a cause of smiles to you, and not of tears! and let me call you father, may I?—it is so much easier said than *grandfather*, and I think, if possible, it is sweeter still."

"Yes, my dear boy, do call me so!" replied the old gentleman, eagerly; "I like it a great deal better; and you shall find, Stephen, that I will be a true father to you. Thank God! I have still the power to be so, though I am married. And as to that, Stephen, I have not made a marriage that will in any way be likely to injure you, but quite the contrary. Mrs. Mathews is an heiress, my dear boy, and this house, and the handsome property that surrounds it, is entirely at her own disposal as long as she lives, but it is my property after, and is left entirely at my own disposal. And this is a great comfort to me now you are come! My own property is not quite so large as that of my wife, but it is a pretty property too,

and quite independent and unencumbered, Stephen, and both the one and the other are entirely at my disposal. I tell you all this at once, my dear boy, because it will be greatly for the happiness of us both, Stephen, that there should be no secrets, no reserve of any kind between us. We ought to be everything to each other, we ought indeed ! more like brothers, I should say, than anything else."

"How exactly that is what I feel, my dear father !" exclaimed the young man, his voice trembling from emotion ; "and oh ! if I could but hope to make you as happy as I feel sure you will make me," he added, "I should think Weldon Grange something a great deal more like heaven than earth."

"And between us, if we can manage matters cleverly, we will see if we can't make it so," returned Mr. Mathews, with an unusual degree of vivacity. "The fact is that hitherto, Stephen, since my marriage, I mean, I could not help feeling that there was two to one upon any point great or small, where I had an opinion that differed from theirs. But now things will be changed."

"But you forget, father," said the youth, rather sadly, "you forget that I am nobody ! How can my poor voice count for anything against the master of the house and his daughter ?"

"We shall see, my dear boy, we shall see. If you play your cards well with that face of yours, I don't think anybody can be able to resist you. Besides I have something else to tell you," he added, "my wife has been talking to me about you since luncheon, and although I know well enough that she is too much in love with me to make it very easy for her to deny me anything, yet she set off in such a way just now as to put me in a tremble, Stephen, from head to foot ; for she began to look as stiff and as stern as the church tower, when she alluded to my not having been married, you know."

Stephen on hearing this said nothing, but screwed his handsome mouth into a circle, and performed a low and very sweet little whistle.

Mr. Mathews rubbed his hands, and laughed. "How exactly, how very exactly you are like what I was at your age, Stephen ;" he exclaimed. "If I happened to have any old friend call on me, who knew me just at the time that I first became acquainted with Martha Cornington, there would be very little use in my denying the relationship between us, for he would be sure to find it out at the first glance. He would,

indeed, Stephen!" and once again Mr. Mathews rubbed his hands, and laughed heartily.

"And how did you get your right honourable lady out of her stiff fit, father?" demanded the young man, whose handsome eyes spoke more interest in the question than the tones of his voice expressed.

"Why thereby hangs a tale, Stephen, and it seems rather a sentimental one, too; only I don't think my right honourable lady, as you call her, was ever handsome enough to be the heroine of such a one. You would hardly think, now, I dare say, to look at her, that Mrs. Mathews was several years younger than I am."

"Impossible, father!" exclaimed Stephen, knitting his brows as if from a feeling of indignation at such an attempt to impose upon him.

"It is true though, upon my word and honour," replied the old gentleman, very solemnly; "but Mrs. Mathews is a very plain woman, that's a fact, and it is quite astonishing what a difference that makes as to showing age. But now you must listen to my romantic story; and for what I know, Stephen, you may contrive, if you are a clever fellow, to get up a little romance of your own to make a sequel to it; for I promise you there is a young lady in the case."

"But she must be a beauty, father, or I will have nothing to say to her," replied Stephen. "She must be as handsome as my dear grandmother was the first time you ever saw her. I mean to be like you in everything as well as in features."

"As to that, you saucy chap," replied the delighted Mr. Mathews, "you must take your chance, I know nothing whatever about her beauty; but what, perhaps, may be as much to the purpose, Stephen, I have a great idea that she has a good fortune, because my wife looked so vastly grand and dignified when she mentioned her. However, all she told me explicitly about her was this: She is, it seems, the only and the orphan child of a Mr. Anderson, who, before he was a married man had been a great friend and intimate at Weldon Grange. Having lost both mother and father, this young heiress, as I suspect her to be, has been sent over to this country, and consigned to the care of Mr. King and his daughter. Now this consignment has evidently delighted my wife exceedingly; but I fancy that she has been alarming herself by remembering that it was very possible I might object to so troublesome an addition to my family as a young lady inmate might prove;

and I have a great notion, too, that she was by no means sorry to have so fair an opportunity of proposing a compromise, as your *apropos* arrival offered, and it now stands as a matter of agreement, made and concluded between us, that if I keep you here to please myself, she may keep Miss Anderson here to please herself."

"Capital!" exclaimed Stephen, triumphantly, waving his hand over his head. "Now then, my dearest friend, my father, grandfather, and brother, all in one, now then let us see if we cannot contrive to make one another happy! Nature, father, which is stronger than any tie invented by man, Nature teaches us to love one another, and if we refused to obey her, we should be monsters and not men!"

This was said with a degree of fervour and feeling that went straight to the heart of the delighted Mr. Mathews, and as he looked at the towering stature and radiant countenance of the magnificent young man who thus addressed him; he said, not quite aloud, yet not quite in soliloquy,—

"I should not only be a monster, but a fool into the bargain, if I could look at anything so like me, and not own it for my own."

It is possible that the youthful Stephen both heard and understood this affectionate outpouring of paternal love, and if he did it may be that it created an answering emotion too strong to be expressed suitably in words,—for certain it is that he turned away, and did not for the next minute or two permit his eye to meet that of his newly-found, but tenderly-cherished progenitor.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. MATHEWS, meanwhile, after very satisfactorily explaining to her father the necessity which existed for her going to London by the early train on the following morning, in order to escort poor John Anderson's orphan daughter to Weldon, enjoyed herself greatly for an hour or two in a manner perfectly new to her, and in an occupation as unlike as

possible to all which had hitherto employed her time, and constituted her happiness. In a word, she devoted herself altogether to the comfortable arrangement and nice decoration of the "Red Room."

Naturalists tell us that all animals have some distinct peculiarity which marks their species. The recondite philosophy contained in the well-known fable of the cat metamorphosed into a woman is a fine illustration of this; and the manner in which my learned book-worm of a heroine, whose mode of life was more like that of the musty fellow of a college than of a notable female—the manner in which she passed the hours of this eventful morning was another.

The care which she bestowed upon superintending the arrangement of the delicate toilet-cover, and the pretty pin-cushion, the introduction of a little set of book-shelves, which, if not absolutely filled with "ladylike rhyme," was decidedly feminine in its arrangement, the careful lining of every drawer with spotless paper, and finally the placing a dainty nosegay on the little table in the middle of the room, all clearly betrayed the fact that Mrs. Mathews, with all her learning, was still a woman.

Early on the following morning the faithful Sally Spicer was ready with her coffee, and ready, too, with her bonnet and shawl after it, to escort her mistress to the railroad station, her attendance being greatly preferred to any other for many reasons, and among others for the opportunity it afforded for a few last hints respecting a variety of minor comforts for the expected guest which suggested themselves *en route*.

But even when all these cares were left behind her, my heroine was very far from recovering her accustomed composure of spirits. Not only was she a woman still, and a mere woman, but as far as feeling was concerned, she was more like a young woman than an old one. For, as she thought of the approaching interview with John Anderson's daughter, her temples throbbed, and her heart beat, till at length she became aware of her own condition, and then, to do her justice, she was very heartily ashamed of herself.

Whenever this feeling comes upon well-disposed people, they generally endeavour to become reconciled to themselves by behaving better; and this was the case with Mrs. Mathews; so that by the time she reached No. 5, John-street, London Docks, she had not only the appearance of being very sedately tranquil, but in real truth found herself sufficiently reasonable to anticipate looking for the likeness of the father in the child, without

betraying any emotion that might compromise her reputation for wisdom.

On reaching the house that had been indicated to her, she found it, as she expected, of the very humblest description of decent lodging-houses; but such as it was, it was only to its tiny back parlour that she was admitted, and in that tiny back parlour, seated upon a tiny sofa bed, she found a young girl, who sprang up the moment she entered, with an eagerness of movement, which plainly showed that she had been impatiently waiting for her visitor.

But having done this, and made one step which almost brought her to the door, the poor girl suddenly stopped, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

Had Mr. Mathews witnessed this, and compared it to the manner in which his beloved grandson had first greeted him, he would probably have accounted for the difference by remembering that poor dear Mrs. Mathews was very plain. He would have been mistaken, however, as he sometimes was in his interpretations of the thoughts and feelings of those about him. The plainness of Mrs. Mathews had nothing to do with the emotion of Janet Anderson.

For one moment the startled visitor paused, but advanced in the next to where the weeping girl stood motionless, and gently with both hands withdrawing both the hands of Janet from her face, affectionately kissed her.

The caress was instantly, and cordially returned, and then they each of them drew back sufficiently to let their eyes meet, and then they both smiled. But it was Janet who spoke first.

“What a letter you wrote to me!” said she.

The words were very simple words, and were spoken so abruptly, and so rapidly, as not, by themselves, to convey any very precise meaning, but her dark blue eyes spoke a commentary that expressed a good deal.

“It was not a very long one, my dear,” said Mrs. Mathews, looking earnestly at her, but with a smile that, notwithstanding her plainness, it was exceedingly agreeable to Janet to contemplate.

“It was long enough, Mrs. Mathews, to conjure out of me more sad, melancholy, and despairing thoughts than you ever felt in all your life, I think. Few people, very few people, I hope are so completely miserable, and so completely helpless, as I was when I wrote to you.”

"Did your father never tell you, Janet, that you would be sure to find a friend in me?" said Mrs. Mathews.

"Yes, he did tell me so; he very often told me so, and nothing seemed to give him so much comfort, and pleasure, as saying it. But my father, Mrs. Mathews, had no knowledge, no thought, no suspicion of what was going to happen to me. If he had, I hardly think he would have written to you, or spoken to me about you at all. It was a very different thing asking you to take a little friendly notice of a young lady of fortune, who was the orphan child of an old friend, and throwing upon you, as I have dared to do, a perfectly destitute girl, whose only chance of being saved from starving rested on the possibility of your being rash enough to recommend her as a servant."

"Well, Janet! You see I have a conscience. I am not rash enough to recommend you as a servant. And if I had any doubts before I saw you, I have none now; for I really do not think you would answer in that capacity at all."

"But were you not rash in writing me such a letter as you did? Are you aware, Mrs. Mathews, that I have not had a single miserable, really miserable moment since I received it?"

"No, Janet, I cannot accuse myself of rashness on that account, because the effect you speak of was exactly what I intended to produce," replied Mrs. Mathews. "The child of your father, Janet Anderson, has no right to be miserable, when within reach of one whom he honoured by calling his friend."

The light tone of the dialogue was spoiled by these words, for the violet tinted eyes of Miss Janet, began again to distil some pearly drops.

"What does one do, my dear," said Mrs. Mathews, "when one wants to make the servant of the house hear one? I don't see any bell."

"No, Mrs. Mathews, my apartment has no bell," replied Janet, cheering her own tears by a merry smile. "One opens the door, and screams."

When Mrs. Mathews first fixed her eyes upon the bright and beautiful face of the young Janet, her judgment acknowledged her beauty, but her heart felt disappointed, for Janet was not, at first sight, like her father, but as she now answered her, there was a slight Scotch accent in her pronunciation which produced a strangely strong effect on Mrs. Mathews, considering her age and wisdom. In the smile, too, which was rather peculiar from its arch expression, she fancied, or she found a resemblance which very nearly conquered all her efforts to behave exactly,<sup>as</sup>

she ought to do, for she longed to throw her arms round the young girl's neck and press her to her heart.

But notwithstanding all this folly, Mrs. Mathews was really not a silly woman, and the better part of her judgment so far prevailed, as to enable her to return Janet's smile without embracing her, and then to say, "In that case, my dear, I must trouble you to open the door and scream."

"I will obey instantly," replied Janet, "but should the scream prove successful, and the mistress of the house or her little daughter appear to answer it, what must I do next? Or is there anything that I can do for you myself in case I should scream in vain?"

"In the first place tell me, Janet, if you are quite ready to set off with me? Are all your packings finished?"

"All," replied Janet. "There was something in your letter, Mrs. Mathews, that left me in no doubt, almost incredible as its contents appeared, that it was neither a dream nor a fable, and accordingly the box you see there, and the larger one that stands outside the door, were both of them packed, locked, and corded, before I broke my fast this morning."

"Did you make a good breakfast, Janet?" said Mrs. Mathews.

Janet for some reason or other coloured slightly as she replied, "Oh yes, very well. But I was not very hungry. Perhaps I have not recovered my voyage yet. I was never hungry while I was on board."

For one short moment there was a look of tenderness in the eyes of Mrs. Mathews which it is highly probable they never expressed before. The fact is, that Janet, with all her prettiness, and even despite her merry smile, did not look well; her colour varied too readily, and, when it faded, the fair face not only looked pale, but languid.

Her new friend, however, did not deem it wise to make any observation upon her looks, but returning to the subject of her own wants and wishes, declared that while waiting for the hour at which they were to join the Weldon train, she thought by far the best way in which they could occupy themselves would be by eating luncheon.

"Alas! dear lady," replied Janet, "I greatly fear that you have landed on a very inhospitable coast, and that you will obtain nothing here that will serve the purpose of a luncheon for you."

"Few people who have lived for so many years as I have

done, at so short a distance from the great Babylon, know so little about it as I do," returned Mrs. Mathews, "but nevertheless I suspect that I know a great deal more about it than you do, my dear. So please to open the door, and set about the screaming forthwith."

Janet obeyed her promptly and literally, and the result of this was the appearance of an exceedingly dirty female, who issued with a duster in her hand from the front parlour, pronouncing in no very civil tone the words, "What d'ye want?"

Janet looked round for further orders, but Mrs. Mathews seemed to think that she should manage matters best without her intervention, and she therefore extended one hand, with which she gently drew her back within the shelter of her own premises, while with the other she took her purse from her pocket.

The effect that may be produced by the appearance of a purse is too hackneyed a theme to dwell upon; it will suffice to observe that Miss Janet Anderson's landlady, having first wiped her own hands upon her own dirty duster, made as respectful a courtesy as she knew how to perform, and looking very fixedly in Mrs. Mathews' face, pronounced the words, "Pray, ma'am, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Why, I should think you might easily do all I want, my good woman, and I shall be happy to pay you for your trouble. In the first place, or rather the last in time, but the first in importance, I shall want a hackney-coach to be at this door in perfect good time, and without any hurrying, to convey this young lady, and her luggage, and myself into the bargain, to the Euston-square station, for the four-o'clock train. You understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the dirty mistress of the mansion.

"And now tell me," resumed Mrs. Mathews, "if you have anything like a really good pastry-cook near you?"

"Why, as to very near, I can't say we have," replied the woman; "but if you don't mind paying for the trouble of sending a good bit off, my lady, I know of a capital good one who would send you everything you would be pleased to order, and that of the very best."

"And can you promise to let us have some really good fresh water?" demanded Mrs. Mathews, rather anxiously.

"Water!" repeated the woman in an accent which seemed to indicate some little diminution of zeal; "yes, ma'am, you can have water if you want it."

"Very well, then. Send immediately to this excellent, distant pastry-cook, and order half-a-dozen patties, and half-a-dozen buns, and let them be brought here immediately."

"Yes, ma'am, I can send, certainly, if it is your pleasure," returned the woman, with an aspect of very meek humility; "only such a shop as that, ma'am, is not over-fond of sending out things on credit to such a poor place as this, ma'am."

Mrs Mathews understood the hint, and drawing forth a splendid crown-piece from the purse she still held in her hand, she deposited it on the ready palm of the landlady, who instantly disappeared into her front parlour, her departure upon her errand being speedily announced by the loud slamming of the street-door.

Notwithstanding the boasted distance, the luncheon appeared with great celerity, and long before the two ladies expected it; for they were both very busily engaged, the elder one in earnestly watching the face of her companion as she talked to her, for the sake of tracing looks that might recal times past; and the younger one no less sedulously employed in a like task, for the purpose of studying the expression of one whose character and temper were likely to be so vitally important to her for the future.

It was evident that neither lady had discovered anything particularly discouraging or disagreeable, for the luncheon, when it arrived, was very gaily eaten, and it was so evident that the more they talked the more they had to say, that had not the punctual arrival of the carriage depended upon the landlady instead of upon her guests, it is highly probable that not even the fate-like certainty of railroad travelling would have sufficed to make them "break off" in proper time.



## CHAPTER XIX.

NEVER, perhaps, did an acquaintance, commenced between two persons of ages and positions so different, gallop on more rapidly towards intimacy and friendship than did that between Mrs. Mathews and Janet Anderson.

Each had felt before they met that the approaching interview was an important one, and each felt when it was over, that it more than fulfilled their most sanguine hopes.

But here the parallel between them ended. Mrs. Mathews felt, as she approached her home, not only that it was her home, but that she ruled there with no disputed sway, and that she was conveying thither the young creature she so ardently desired to cherish, with the comfortable certainty that she could be to her all that she wished to be.

But, alas! far different were the feelings of poor Janet. Instead of the delightful consciousness that she had as much the power, as the will of producing a great and most favourable influence on the destiny of this new found friend, she felt more strongly every moment, as she approached the unknown spot, which she was generously permitted for the present to call her home, that the family she was about to find there might be utterly destitute of all the qualities which had so rapidly won her young heart to love Mrs. Mathews.

Not only might she dislike them, but, which was infinitely more probable, she thought they might dislike her. They might dislike her intrusion among them; they might be jealous of the affection which dear Mrs. Mathews already seemed disposed to feel for her. In short, the nearer she drew to the end of her rapid journey the more she dreaded arriving at its conclusion.

Of all this Mrs. Mathews had not the slightest suspicion, and accordingly there was nothing in any word she uttered which in any way tended to alleviate her young companion's terrors; which she certainly might have done very easily had she had any notion of their existence.

Instead of this, the sort of *carte du pays* which she attempted to give her, had a very contrary effect.

"You must not expect to find us very agreeable, my dear; for you may chance to be sadly disappointed if you do," said Mrs. Mathews, as they rushed along the last few miles which preceded their arrival at the Weldon station; and as they then happened to be alone in the carriage, she even ventured upon the following alarming particulars:

"My poor dear father is getting very old," she said, "and you must not be vexed or surprised, my dear child, if he does not, at first, seem to make out who you are. He was very fond of your father, but all that, you know, was a great many years ago, and his memory now very often fails him."

Even this was no very agreeable news; for poor Janet felt, by anticipation, how very awkward and disagreeable it would be to endure the poor old gentleman's examination, which would probably end at last by her being told that he could not at all make out who she was, nor why she was there.

"And as to my husband, Janet," resumed Mrs. Mathews, "I must beg you to take my word for it that he is, upon the whole, a very worthy good sort of man. But your father's daughter, my poor child, may be rather likely, I am afraid, to find him dull. In fact, it will be better, perhaps, to tell you the truth at once, and confess that he does not possess, poor good man, any very brilliant conversational powers. Moreover, if he did, my little Janet, I am rather inclined to suspect that you, my dear, would not be likely to profit very greatly thereby."

It certainly was not very extraordinary that the young stranger should construe this last clause into a confession that the husband of Mrs. Mathews was not inclined to welcome her intrusion so kindly as that lady herself her done, and certainly the words sank deeply and heavily into her heart. Neither did she feel herself much cheered when her protectress gaily added: "But as to the other member of our domestic circle, I will not pretend to enlighten you, for I am in a state of the most profound darkness on the subject myself. This other member is, I presume, very nearly as young as yourself, my dear. But if I am not very greatly mistaken, he is greatly less backward than I suspect you to be in—how shall I express it?—in general information. He is the grandson of Mr. Mathews, and is just arrived from the West Indies, (where I believe he was born,) to pay us a visit at Weldon Grange. Very kind of him, my dear, isn't it?"

"And I am kindly come from the East Indies to pay them a visit :" thought poor Janet, while a feeling very like choking rendered it quite impossible for her to attempt making any answer to this lively sally.

"And this clever youth," resumed Mrs. Mathews, "is quite as handsome as he is bright-witted, and if anything could convert poor dear Mr. Mathews into a lively personage, I really think it would be the arrival of this youngster, upon whom he appears inclined to bestow all the fondest affection of father and grandfather united in one ! But here we are, Janet ! That is the Weldon station, and there is John the gardener, with his wheelbarrow to convey your boxes. You look pale, dear child ; you are tired, Janet ! I shan't let you appear to night, little

one. You will soon find out what a tyrant I am ; but when you get used to it, perhaps you won't mind it."

It would have been very nearly impossible for Mrs. Mathews to have announced anything to Janet at that moment which could have produced an equal sensation of pleasure.

The idea of escaping into bed, instead of having to undergo an introduction to the three gentlemen who had just been described to her, produced, it must be confessed, a much greater feeling of happiness than was at all reasonable. If she had tried to express this feeling to its full extent, she could not have done it; but when, after quitting the railroad carriage, she passed her arm uninvited under that of her new friend, and murmured, as she gave it a little, gentle, loving pressure, "How very kind you are to me!" Mrs. Mathews understood her quite well enough.

There was a footman at the hall-door as they passed in, but Sally Spicer was a step in advance of him, and took the parasols of the two ladies from them before they had entered the house.

This was convenient, for it gave the mistress of it the opportunity of saying to her,—

"Don't let William open the drawing-room door, Sally. Let us go up to her room at once."

And to her room they did go ; and perhaps the moment in which Mrs Mathews, looking round upon all its pretty preparations for comfort, took Janet Anderson by the hand, and said, as she placed her upon the sofa, "This is your room, your own room, my sweet Janet ; and so let it be, my dear adopted daughter, till some one who loves you as well, and has a right still stronger than my own, shall take you away from it,"—perhaps that moment was the happiest that Mrs Mathews had ever yet known.

Whether the influence was electrical, or mesmeric, or sympathetic in any other mode, I know not ; but certain it is that the words, or the manner, or the looks of Mrs. Mathews did, by some means or other, entirely efface and carry away all the doubting, fearing, trembling emotions which seemed to have taken possession of Janet as she entered the house.

Nay, so bright and beautiful was the look that Mrs. Mathews received in answer to her words, that she began to doubt the wisdom of the decision which had doomed Janet to remain in her bed-room, instead of coming downstairs to dinner.

"But perhaps it is folly after all, Janet, for me to make you stay up here, instead of letting you come down to make ac-

quaintance with the beautiful grandson? Now I think of it, I do not approve the scheme at all. It is absolutely turning myself into a most barbarous jailor. Why should I tell you to sit up here, pretty one, when you might amuse yourself so much better down stairs."

"Think of it once again, will you, Mrs. Mathews?" replied Janet, coaxingly; "cannot you fancy yourself to be me? And if you can, do you not feel at once how much better it must be for me to keep quiet for this one evening, in this dear beautiful room, instead of trying to dress myself smart in order to show myself off to the rest of the family."

"I believe you are right, Janet; I think you will be more comfortable up here," was the reply; "but you will let me come up to have another peep at you before you go to bed? We are going to dinner in a minute or two; for my polite husband insisted upon waiting dinner for us, and therefore dine we must. I will send you up a chicken's wing and some fruit, which will be quite dinner enough for you. I think you have a little fever, my child. Your little hand is hot, and you are flushed one moment and pale the next."

"And if so, dearest lady, it would be better that I should eat no dinner at all. And if you would be so indulgent as to send me the fruit, without the chicken's wing, and your free leave to go to bed outright, I think you would find me tomorrow morning perfectly well, and without any malady of any kind."

"Then so be it, Janet Anderson," replied her hostess, who pronounced the name of her guest with a degree of pleasure which she enjoyed the more from the pleasant conviction that nobody could understand it but herself, and then she left her, with as little of fussy hospitality as might be, but not without taking good care that everything she was likely to wish for she should have; and upon this principle a teapot waited upon her in company with the fruit; and then Sally Spicer silently uncorded her trunks, and then a huge vase of warm water was seen steaming away beside her washing table, and then a night-lamp was observed to twinkle within the fender, and then her door was very noiselessly closed, and Janet was left to go to sleep if she liked it.

But it was a good while before she did like it. When left in perfect silence and solitude to her own reflections, she began so sensibly to feel the contrast between her present situation, and what it had been when she sat down in trembling to write her letter to Mrs. Mathews, that it took a considerable time to bring

the two pictures so distinctly before her mind's eye as to prevent her doubting the reality of either ; and when at length she did feel quite certain that she was awake, and not dreaming, and that the kind heart upon which she was already leaning, with such delightful confidence, was as much a reality as the soft pillow which sustained her youthful cheek,—when, at length, she had fully persuaded herself of this, it took some time longer still before she could bring to a close her grateful thanks to Heaven for making her such a very happy creature.

But at last she sunk into the deep, delightful sleep which youthful exhaustion is sure to bring ; her last thought taking the form of a blessing on her father for having bequeathed her such a friend as Mrs. Mathews.

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## CHAPTER XX.

THE sleep of Janet Anderson on this first night of her being sheltered by the roof of Weldon Grange, and which, moreover, was the first for many months in which she had laid herself on any bed without an aching sensation of anxiety at her heart, her first night's sleep at Weldon Grange was both profound and long. But as she had gone to bed very early it was not very late when she awoke. She had drawn back her curtains, and opened all the window shutters before she went to bed, for Janet Anderson loved to open her eyes upon the light of the coming day instead of upon the darkness of the past night. Her first peep upon the outer world was a timid one, for she could not guess what hour it might be, and for anything she knew to the contrary, the whole of the Mathews' household might be within reach of seeing her in her night-cap. But she soon perceived that there was no great danger of this ; for, except that the birds were singing, everything was profoundly still.

Nor were there any windows to overlook her own, for the garden front of Weldon Grange was in a straight line, having neither bow windows nor projecting corners in it. This was a great comfort, for it enabled her fearlessly to throw up the

sash, which operation, however, she performed with a gentleness that could awaken no one; and then, did she not enjoy the bright green scene before her? She who had never in her life looked upon an English garden before, and who had just passed so many dreary, dreary weeks in sailing across the ocean, with her own miserable doubts and fears for her constant companions! An English garden, judiciously made up of lawn, flowers, and trees, with a mixture of pasture and woodland for its background, when seen at the hour of prime, is likely enough to seem beautiful to any eyes; but to poor, long-suffering Janet, its beauty, its perfume, its gaily-twittering music, together with the delightful confidence which she felt in the friendship which welcomed her to all its loveliness, was overpowering, and she dropped on her knees beside a chair, laid down her head, and wept.

But happiness rarely permits us "to cry for what we are glad of" very long, and Janet was speedily engaged in completing such a toilet as might enable her, if she could but find the way out, to enjoy a walk among all the beautiful things that were before her.

Fortunately for her, the housemaid at Weldon Grange was not addicted to late hours, for she was already busily employed in performing the duties of her profession in the hall, the door of which towards the garden was already most invitingly open.

Janet nodded her head good-humouredly to the girl as she passed her, but Martha was not too respectful to be friendly, and she therefore suspended her occupation, and said,

"I hope you slept well, Miss?"

"Very well, indeed, thank you," was the reply, to which was added an inquiry as to the best direction in which to take a walk not too long for the time left her before the hour of breakfast.

"Oh there's plenty of time, Miss, for a beautiful walk," replied the girl, "and if you'll please turn to the right as you go out, you'll come to a little gate as opens with a latch that will lead you straight to what we call the primrose-copse, 'cause there's such quantities of primroses there, and violets too, Miss, if you'll look for them."

These instructions were very gratefully received, and the happy Janet set forth upon her first English walk.

The path to the copse was certainly not difficult to find; if it had been so, Janet Anderson would most assuredly have missed it, for her delight at every step she took was much too

great to leave her in possession of her usual quiet presence of mind.

A very noble row of elms would have shaded, if in full leaf, the whole length of the path which led through the first large field upon which the little garden-gate opened, and the abundant crop of grass, which was already within a week or two of being ready for the scythe, appeared to Janet to be the most beautiful vegetation she had ever seen.

Nevertheless she did not forget the promised primroses and violets ; and notwithstanding that she stopped in an ecstasy of delight to look about her at least half-a-dozen times before she reached the copse, she did contrive to arrive there at last without losing her way.

Martha had in no degree exaggerated the fecundity of this copse as to its production of primroses and violets, and the hour of the morning, as well as the season of the year, assisted in showing them off to the greatest advantage ; and, after all, though she had suffered so much, and had certainly grown rather grave in consequence of it, Janet was really still quite a young girl, and it was with all the delight of quite a young girl that she now set about making a large collection both of the primroses and the violets.

She had already collected more than she could conveniently carry in her left hand, while she assiduously went on increasing her treasures with her right, and had then deposited the whole collection at the foot of a tree, as she daintily stepped down into a dry ditch, while she made prize of some peculiarly magnificent specimens which flourished on the further side of it, when she was startled by hearing a very magnificent voice, at no great distance from her, begin to sing Leporello's celebrated catalogue of his master's loves.

At the first moment she was terrified, her flower-gathering was suspended, and she remained in doubt whether she had better keep herself perfectly quiet, and so remain concealed, or spring out of the ditch and run home.

But before she had decided the question, her alarm had very decidedly given place to pleasure. Of the meaning of the words she knew nothing ; but the notes upon which they were pronounced were enchanting to her, and she would have been puzzled if asked to explain why they were so. Of their comic spirit she could of course comprehend nothing, and as little was she cognizant of any musical skill attending their enunciation. But there was something most startling, vibrating, and

deliciously clear in the sound; and well there might be, for they proceeded from one of the finest voices that ever was heard; so that, all ignorant as she was, she listened to them with delight.

But presently these delightful sounds died away in the distance; she was greatly consoled, however, for the loss of them by the consciousness that she should now be presently relieved from the embarrassment of her position, which decidedly was an awkward one, as it obliged her either to remain cowering in the ditch, to avoid being seen, or else to spring out of it, and confront the performer in a more striking and startling style than would have been at all agreeable to her.

But now she felt herself to be quite safe, for the voice gradually passed away in a contrary direction to that which led to the house, and therefore, while quietly waiting till it was quite out of hearing, she gathered a few more of the very whitest and sweetest violets that ever were seen or smelt, and then boldly left her place of concealment, recovered those which she had deposited at the foot of the tree, and set off to retrace her steps towards the mansion. But having walked about half way across the large meadow, the path through which was so delightfully shaded by the row of elms, she perceived a low bench at the foot of one of them, which had escaped her notice as she approached from the other side, but which now tempted her, as her ramble had been much shorter than she intended, to sit down and enjoy at leisure the exceeding beauty of the morning.

She placed her flowers on the bench beside her, took off her bonnet, leaned her head against the tree, and then closed her eyes, certainly not in sleep, but for the sake of enjoying, in the very perfection of *dolce-far-niente*, the sweet air that played upon her cheek, and the sweet notes of an accomplished blackbird, who really seemed to have perched himself on a branch above her head for the express purpose of regaling her with a serenade.

How long she sat thus she would have found it difficult to tell us, for it is no easy matter to count moments of such delicious ease; but however long the interval might have been, she would have wished it longer still, for not only was she enjoying herself most completely, but she was roused from it by the sound of a step so sudden in its approach as to startle her unpleasantly.

She opened her eyes almost in terror, and perceived standing

almost close before her, and gazing very earnestly indeed at her face, a young man, who was decidedly the very handsomest individual she had ever beheld of the *genus homo*.

This was a sort of adventure which could scarcely fail of producing a little appearance of emotion in any young lady of seventeen, even if she had not been a stranger in the land. Besides, it was exceedingly disagreeable to be seen lying about in that strange way, with one's eyes shut and without one's bonnet; in short, Janet got up blushing vehemently, and utterly forgetting the large collection of primroses and violets which lay on the bench beside her, she set off with a quick step upon her return home, tying her bonnet very tightly under her chin as she went.

As no obtrusive step appeared to follow her, she relaxed her speed before she reached the end of the meadow, for she felt that she was getting out of breath, and she thought that if dear Mrs. Mathews happened to be walking in the garden, and met her in that condition, she should feel exceedingly foolish if she were obliged to account for it by saying that she had seen a young man under the elm-tree.

Scarcely, however, had she resumed the ordinary pace at which well-behaved young ladies are accustomed to walk, than, to her utter astonishment, she perceived that the same young gentleman whom she had seen staring at her when she was so unfortunately without her bonnet, was now actually walking beside her.

"Miss Anderson?" said he, interrogatively, and bowing with great politeness. "It must be Miss Anderson! I am quite sure of it. What I heard from Mrs. Mathews last night, about a tired young lady who was gone to bed, was quite enough to make me sure that I am speaking to the same young lady now."

A vast deal of extra meaning may be given to words by the accent in which they are spoken. Had Janet been told as distinctly as words could express it, that Mrs. Mathews had spoken favourably of her appearance, and that the young gentleman beside her perfectly agreed with her in opinion upon that point, she could not have understood it better; and therefore she blushed again, and walked on a little faster than before.

"Don't run away from me till I have restored your sweet-scented bouquet to you," said the young man, with a step so rapid in advance as to bring him exactly in front of her.

She stopped for a moment, almost by necessity, for she could

have only avoided doing so by very rudely passing him; and then he presented her nosegay to her with a very graceful bow, having bound it skilfully together with a blade or two of the long grass.

The value of the flowers was greatly increased by this ingenious device, for it had become much too large to be conveniently held without it, and the well-timed gallantry was repaid by a very gracious smile on the part of the young lady,—who, of course, by this time knew perfectly well that the handsome young gentleman was no other than the Stephen Cornington whom Mrs. Mathews had already mentioned to her as the grandson of her husband, and with whom, therefore, there could be no sort of objection to her making acquaintance.

“Shall I be forgiven,” resumed Stephen, while his magnificent eyes sought for a reply in hers; “shall I be forgiven for this flagrant breach of honesty?”

And as he spoke he drew forth from his waistcoat-pocket a very tiny bunch of the white violets, not more perhaps than half-a-dozen.

“Will you forgive me,” he repeated, “for having stolen these? I know it was dishonourable. It was not, however, a breach of confidence, you know; for when you ran away from me you did not confide them to my care. Had you done that, I would, like a faithful dog, have breathed out my life beside the treasure, rather than suffer it to have been violated,—the hand that seized it must have slain me first. Will you then forgive me for having taken these?”

And Mr. Stephen Cornington pressed them to his lips as he spoke.

Perhaps Janet did not see this, or, perhaps, if she did, she only thought he was inhaling their fragrance. At any rate, she certainly had no intention of disputing the possession of them; she answered only by half a smile and half a bow. But there was so much modesty in Stephen Cornington that he contented himself even with that, as was evident by his thinking himself privileged to retain the flowers, which he placed within the bosom of his waistcoat, deliberately unbuttoning that garment to admit them.

It was just possible that Janet might not have seen this manœuvre either, although the young gentleman walked backwards before her as he performed it; but she appeared to be looking rather at her own bouquet than at his. But as this backward movement, though really performed with infinite

grace, rendered their progress slow, she said, "I shall not like to keep Mrs. Mathews waiting breakfast for me, and therefore you must excuse me, Sir, if I walk a little faster."

"And it may be that you will not like that Mrs. Mathews should see you return with an escort?" replied the young man, again fixing his eyes on hers, and pressing the tips of his fingers to his lips, as he bounded away from her, and sprang lightly over the hedge near which they were walking.

Janet Anderson, meanwhile, quietly pursued her way to the house, and entered it as Mrs. Mathews was crossing the hall to the breakfast-parlour.

Her greeting was exactly such as the heart of Janet longed to receive from her, easy, familiar, and affectionate.

There was not much natural, and not an atom of artificial shyness in Janet Anderson; which, young as she was, may easily be explained by the fact, that from her earliest infancy she had been the almost constant companion of her father, and had always been permitted to associate freely and familiarly with his familiar friends; in addition to which she was by nature and habit sincere, and being equally free both from pretension and affectation, it was pretty nearly impossible that she should be shy.

Nevertheless she was, in her own way, sensitive enough; and had she found upon meeting Mrs. Mathews in the morning, that she had in any way mistaken, or over-rated the affectionate familiarity of her manner over night, a most mimosa-like process would have instantly taken place in her feelings, which would have caused her to shrink from all without, and wrap up all within more closely than anything merely deserving the name of shyness could have caused her to do.

But happily, most happily for both of them, nothing of this kind occurred on either side. The morning song and evening song were both alike; and Mrs. Mathews and Janet Anderson walked arm-in-arm together into the breakfast-room, looking and feeling as if they had known each other for many years.

Old Mr. King was already seated in his accustomed place at the breakfast-table; and there was something very amiable, ay, and very graceful, too, in the manner in which he welcomed the orphan daughter of his old friend.

"You will not think her like him at first, father," said Mrs. Mathews, watching with interest, almost with anxiety, the effect which the sight of Janet produced on him; and greatly was she delighted when he replied, "You are mistaken, Mary,

you are quite mistaken there, for I *do* see a likeness, a very great likeness. It is in the smile, my dear. Oh, yes ! you are very like your good father when you smile. Upon my word, I could almost fancy that I see John Anderson before me now, so strongly do you remind me of him ! ”

Mrs. Mathews, though not a very kissing person, certainly did long at that moment to put her arms round the neck of her father, and give him a salute ; she restrained her feelings, however, and the more easily perhaps, because at that moment her well-dressed husband entered the room.

“ I am delighted, fair lady ! ” said he, approaching Janet very much with the step of a venerable dancing-master, “ I am very truly delighted to have the honour and happiness of being presented to you at last. It was a great disappointment, a very heavy disappointment to us gentlemen, not to see you last night, fair lady. It was an honour and happiness that we had been anticipating during the whole day ”

“ Honour and happiness ! ” Poor Janet ! she had almost forgotten her own destitute condition, but now, for a moment, she remembered it very painfully, and as the smiling Mr. Mathews stood obsequiously bowing before her she blushed vehemently and fixed her eyes upon the ground without replying a word.

Had any such quizzing thoughts as the poor stranger suspected been the origin of Mr. Mathews’ very elaborate grimaces, his chance of forgiveness at the hands of his wife would have been small, and it might be difficult to say to what lengths her indignation might have carried her ; but she knew the good man too well to suspect anything of the kind. Her keen eye was upon him as he offered his ridiculous greeting to her *protégée*, and she was not slow to perceive that Janet was very painfully oppressed by the manner of it ; but she at once acquitted her spouse of any worse wickedness than the intention of captivating her to the very utmost extent that an elderly gentleman can captivate ; and it was therefore with a smile of fun, instead of a frown of rage, that she now came to the rescue of the frightened girl.

“ My Janet is a shy little puss, Mr. Mathews,” she said, “ and you must wait till you are better acquainted before you permit her to be fully aware what a very fine gentleman she is come to live with. He is a very fine gentleman, Janet,” she continued, leading her pretty guest to a chair at the table, close beside her own ; “ but he is a good sort of man into the

bargain, and therefore you must not look as if you were afraid of him."

"Afraid of me!" exclaimed Mr. Mathews, in a voice of very genuine alarm, "God forbid! Mrs. Mathews—God forbid! my dear; perhaps, as she is young she has never been treated quite like a grown-up young lady yet, and I am sure I would not put her out of the way for the world."

And then Janet, having tact enough to perceive that he spoke with the most perfect sincerity, recovered herself immediately, and sat down without feeling afraid of anybody, and with a lightness of heart which she would have gravely declared, about twenty-four hours before, it was quite impossible she could ever feel again.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

"AND here comes Stephen!" joyously exclaimed the happy grandfather, who had been anxiously looking for the young gentleman's appearance, though he did not venture to propose waiting for him; "here comes Stephen at last! Good morning, Sir! Where have you been, I wonder?"

"I have been with the gardener, Sir," said the young man; "he has been showing me his beautiful kitchen-garden. I should not have been so late if he had not kept me to look at his fruit-trees. I really think I have been with him for above an hour."

"You have got a taste for gardening, I suppose," said Mrs. Mathews, as she returned the circular bow by which the young man saluted the party.

"Oh, I hope so!" he replied; "I would not be without it for the world!"

"That is so like me!" exclaimed Mr. Mathews. "Isn't it like me?"

This inquiry, as it was addressed to no one in particular, received no particular answer; but Mrs. Mathews' best apology for this silence was the seeming eagerness with which she said, "We appear to have forgotten that our young friends have never met before."

Upon which Stephen Cornington immediately started up, as if to prepare himself in the most respectful style for the introduction that was to follow; but Janet prepared for it differently, for, addressing Mrs. Mathews, she said, without the slightest appearance of embarrassment, "We have introduced ourselves already; I met this gentleman when I was walking, and he tied up these violets and primroses for me."

"And have you been making acquaintance with the gardener, too?" said Mrs. Mathews; "and did he exhibit his wonderful fruit-trees to you as well as to Mr. Stephen?"

"No, Mrs. Mathews," replied Janet, pulling forth a few of her finest violets from her nosegay, and presenting them to her, "these sweet things did not grow in the garden but in the fields. It was in the field, where all that beautiful high grass is growing, that I met Mr. Cornington."

Mrs. Mathews gave the glance of an instant to the young man, but it was long enough for her to perceive that his colour was considerably heightened, and the bow that he made in acknowledgment of Janet's recognition was made in silence.

Mrs. Mathews would have greatly liked to give a scrutinizing glance at the face of Janet likewise; she would greatly have liked to ascertain whether this quiet little *démenti* had been given *avec intention*, but she could not manage it, for Janet was by this time busily occupied in buttering a roll.

But the silence of Mr. Stephen Cornington did not last long; he did not address himself, however, to the ladies, but to his grandfather.

"You seem to be living in a very nice, green, flowery country, my dear father," said he; "Have you got any town near you?"

"Oh yes; several pretty considerable towns," said Mr. Mathews, "and at no great distance; but we must show you all that by degrees,—and to Miss Anderson likewise," he added, with a most gracious bow and smile.

"Do not call her Miss Anderson; call her Janet," said Mrs. Mathews, "and then she will feel herself at home."

"To be sure, my dear, to be sure; and then everything will be pleasant, and as it ought to be; and you must call my dear boy Stephen, I hate to hear you call him Mr. Cornington! I hate it already, and I know I shall hate it more and more every day."

In reply to this, Mrs. Mathews nodded her head two or three times in quick succession, which seemed perfectly to satisfy her husband, who was in the highest possible spirits, and nodded

and smiled at her in return with a degree of vivacity which seemed intended to prove that he felt as young as he looked.

"And now, Mrs. Mathews, my dear," he resumed, "now that we are all got so comfortably together, we must begin to think a little, and settle a little as to what we had better do first in the way of getting some sort of amusement for our young people. Do you know that I think we have been a little behind-hand in our civilities to the Otterbornes, my dear; don't you think we have?"

"I am always behindhand in my civilities to everybody, I believe," replied Mrs. Mathews; "but our neighbours are very indulgent."

"That's quite true, quite true, indeed!" replied Mr. Mathews, with the air of a man of deep intelligence, who suddenly found himself awakened to the consciousness of a great truth which had hitherto escaped his notice; but after the interval of a moment, during which he appeared to be digesting the new idea which had been presented to him, he added, "And therefore, my dear love, I think the very best thing that we could do to-day would be for us all to go and call at the Manor-house."

It did not appear by any means certain that Mrs. Mathews heard this, for she neither answered, looked up, nor exhibited any other symptom of having heard and comprehended what her husband had said to her.

Nevertheless she did hear him, as was made manifest by what passed afterwards; but the interval shall be occupied by a brief episode, which may be useful as an explanation of what will follow.

The neighbourhood of Weldon, though not a crowded one, had a fair sprinkling of gentlemen's families living within easy distance of each other. The only one of these who bore a title was Sir Charles Otterborne; to him and his family, therefore, must be accorded the honour of precedence in the review we are going to take of these country worthies.

But it must be confessed that, as far as he is concerned personally, it would be difficult to find any individual less deserving honour or distinction of any kind than Sir Charles Otterborne; for he was silly, selfish, and unprincipled; and though his title was an old title, and that the acres which still remained to him had been attached to his name still longer than the title itself, it may be doubted whether all the dignity of the fine old mansion called Otterborne Manor-house would have enabled him

to keep the station he held in the county, if he had inhabited it alone.

But there was a Lady Otterborne, who was as deserving of all admiration and esteem as he was the reverse; and, moreover, they had a son, who very distinctly bore evidence to the dictum of Buffon, that "*les races se féminissent*," for he was as like his mother, and unlike his father, as it was possible for a son to be.

The father was fair, his hair of the colour which civil people call auburn, and rude people call red, and his eyes of the very palest possible shade of greenish grey. He was not a short man, but so greatly disposed to plumpness in every feature and in every limb, as to make him appear much shorter than he really was.

His son, on the contrary, from being as thin as his father was the reverse, appeared to be a much taller man; though in truth he was not so. His eyes and hair, like those of his mother, were nearly as dark as if his origin had been Spanish, and, like her, too, his features were noble, regular, and highly expressive; and every movement and gesture was graceful.

Before Lady Otterborne had passed through the twenty-four years which succeeded her marriage, she had been pre-eminently lovely; and she was so still in the eyes of all who preferred grace and intellectual expression to bloom. She had married Sir Charles, or, rather, by the influence of an uncle she had been married, to him, at the terribly early age of seventeen; and though pale and thin both constitutionally and from great mental suffering, the beauty of her features and the slightness of her form made her look even younger than she really was; so that strangers constantly, and with most perfect *bonne foi*, took her for the sister of her son, who, on his side, looked older than he really was.

The attachment between this mother and son was such as perhaps can only exist under circumstances in some degree similar,—for it might, in fact, be said that each was the only friend of the other.

Except that it made her the mother of such a son, the marriage of Lady Otterborne had been a most unfortunate one. Though well born, she was, at the time of her marriage, portionless, and already an orphan; and it was for this reason that her unprincipled uncle so eagerly accepted for her the proposal of Sir Charles, though his deeply encumbered estate rendered

it impossible for him to settle upon her more than three hundred a year.

The rent-roll of this encumbered estate stated its revenue to be five thousand ; and so it might have been, perhaps, had it not been so deeply mortgaged as to leave a clear income of somewhat less than two.

Herbert Otterborne, the only offspring of this ill-fated marriage, was about eighteen years old, when a distant relation of Lady Otterborne very unexpectedly left her thirty thousand pounds ; and most earnestly did the helpless heiress implore her silly and improvident husband to use this unexpected wealth in clearing his encumbered estate. To this proposal he never made the least objection ; on the contrary, indeed, he never ceased declaring, whenever the subject was mentioned, that the doing so was the only employment of the money that he had ever thought of ; and the hearing this was the only satisfaction that Lady Otterborne ever derived from her legacy,—excepting, indeed, that her son was entered at Christchurch ; an expense which Sir Charles had declared, and very truly, was totally beyond his means before.

Lady Otterborne had endured all the privation and inconvenience of an income sadly insufficient to support the mansion and grounds of Otterborne Manor, with the most uncomplaining resignation ; and, as far as depended upon her, with the most meritorious economy : and most assuredly the period during which she was permitted to give up her horses, and send off her own maid and the butler, was one of much greater peace of mind than that which followed upon Sir Charles getting possession of her legacy ; for not all her gentle influence, though steadily backed by that of her young son, could prevent her husband from re-modelling his establishment, and living at the rate of five or six thousand a year.

Such was the household at the Manor-house, and such was the ostentatious hospitality of Sir Charles, that he did all he could to fill his house with guests, even when the greatly stronger attractions of London prevented him from always receiving them in person.

There was much mutual kindness of feeling and much mutual esteem between Lady Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews ; and perhaps a still stronger feeling of mutual liking and companionship between the young man of the Manor-house and the old lady of the den,—one proof of which was, that he had actually been more than once permitted to enter the said den, in order to find

his way amidst the labyrinth of old volumes that reposed there, and to carry away with him any that he might choose to select. No degree of intimacy to this amount had ever existed as yet between the ladies ; one reason for which was, that the health of Lady Otterborne was too delicate to permit her leaving home at all during the winter ; and whenever this is the case it rarely happens that the invalid finds time enough within the limits of an English summer, so completely to put off stay-at-home habits as to become very sociable. Nevertheless, when Mrs. Mathews did at length condescend to reply to her husband's proposal, it was by saying,—

“I shall have no objection to calling on Lady Otterborne to-day, if Janet has no objection to accompanying me.”

And hereupon, as in duty bound, Janet ventured to assure her that whithersoever she was pleased to take her, thither she was quite certain she should be pleased to go.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

THE intelligent reader will easily guess that, the breakfast being ended, Mrs. Mathews took solitary, quiet, and secure possession of Janet for the purpose of introducing her to that secret bower in which the chief materials of her life's history were to be found ; and then an event occurred which had never occurred before during the course of all the years during which that secret bower had been her chief abode. This event was no less than the deliberately pronouncing a decree by which Janet was made as free of the premises as Mary Mathews, *ci-devant* Mary King, was herself.

It is extremely probable that at the moment this decree was announced to her, Janet Anderson was far from being conscious either of the strength of the impulse by which it was dictated, or of the importance of the privilege it conveyed ; but the sense of this grew upon her so sensibly, and so evidently, as time wore on, that Mrs. Mathews had no reason to suspect that it was not fully appreciated.

It is certain that the first aspect of this oddly-shaped and oddly-furnished apartment, as well as the queer, narrow, twist-

ing little staircase which led to it, was not much calculated to excite admiration ; but by degrees the young girl seemed to awaken to the consciousness of the peaceful seclusion, and the almost sacred leisure which seemed to reign there. And then she began timidly, and as if fearful of appearing presumptuous, to peep at the titles of the great miscellaneous ill-arranged mass of books that in one way or another seemed to occupy every part of the room.

“Is Mr. King a great reader ?” said Janet, who was greatly puzzled to understand why such a vast quantity of books should have been collected together when it was very evident that it had not been the object of the collector to add the dignity of a library (commonly so called) to the habitable apartments of the mansion.

“No, my dear,” quietly replied Mrs. Mathews. “He was very fond of fishing when he was younger, and used to make all his own flies ; and nobody who does that, can have time enough left to become a great reader”

Mrs. Mathews had listened to this question, and answered with the most perfect simplicity and friendly good faith, for she felt that the question was a very natural one,—as it was obviously more likely that a bookish old gentleman should have brought together, for his own private edification and amusement, the multitude of dusky-looking old tomes, with the copious sprinkling of fresh-looking new ones, which filled every corner, and covered every table in the room, than that a woman should have done it ; but had the inquiries of Janet gone further,—had she, for instance, asked the same question respecting Mr. Mathews, with any appearance of being in earnest,—it is highly probable that not even the interesting fact of her being the daughter of John Anderson, could have saved her from a species of contempt which must for ever have prevented any genuine intimacy of intercourse between them.

But, luckily for the happiness of both, there was no danger that any such blunder should be made ; on this point there was a sort of mute sympathy between them which required no aid from words to make itself felt and comprehended. And so, having received Mrs. Mathews’ perfectly intelligible, and therefore perfectly satisfactory answer respecting Mr. King, the young lady, by a species of natural logic, came to the conclusion that all this enormous preparation for study must have been made by Mrs. Mathews herself, for her own especial use and gratification.

There was something very prettily comic in the manner with which Janet, after twice making a slow, demure, and very observant circuit of the chamber, corners and all included, approached at last to the chair in which her new friend had seated herself to watch her proceedings, and said almost in a whisper, as she placed herself upon her knees upon the footstool at her feet, "How will you ever be able to persuade yourself to listen to me when I talk to you? And still more difficult will it be for you to come down from your pedestal to talk to me!"

"You think so, and very, very sincerely, Janet? Ah! I read it in your eyes, my poor child! You are already thinking what will be the easiest way by which you can relieve me from your contemptible presence."

"It is very kind, and very benevolent of you, Mrs. Mathews," replied Janet, "to attribute to me thoughts and feelings so every way proper to my condition; but I am too honest to take advantage of it,—No! I will not deceive you. You are, indeed, quite right in believing that I think it must be a great effort on your part to converse with such a thing as I am; but you are quite wrong in fancying that I have the slightest wish to relieve you from my contemptible presence, as long as I am able to flatter myself that there is any possibility of avoiding it."

"Very well, my dear, that will do, and I dare say we shall understand one another perfectly one of these days," replied Mrs. Mathews. "In the meantime," she continued, "the fact most important for you to know is this; namely, that you are to be most completely your own mistress as to the coming and going to and from this queer old room. Your father has been in it, Janet, and has sat reading in that chair yonder, by the east window there, for hours together, while I was trotting about somewhere or other with my dear old father. And you are, somehow or other, so very like him, Janet, that I could almost fancy as I listen to you that he was come back again. Therefore it is for the sake of old as well as new friendship, that I give you the right of *entrée* here. But I know perfectly well, if you don't, young lady, that if we, either of us, mean to read, such reading, observe, as deserves the name, we must not attempt to perform it together. Wherefore it is furthermore enacted, that you are to carry whatever books you wish to read from this room to your own, only observing that I do not wish they should wander any further. By the way, Janet, there is one study that we may begin, and go through with together,—I mean the study of young Mr. Stephen Cornington's disposition,

talents, and principles; for he is not at all more known to me, than he is to you. I will not ask you to give me your opinion of his character as yet: neither will I give you mine—for in honest truth, we neither of us know enough of him to do it fairly; but you may give me your opinion concerning his looks. Do you think him handsome, Janet?"

"Yes, certainly I do," replied the young girl without the slightest hesitation. "Don't you, Mrs. Mathews? I don't think I ever saw any man so handsome before. Did you?"

"Perhaps not," replied Mrs. Mathews, smiling at the honest sincerity of the avowal; "I really believe he is very handsome."

"Believe! Oh, I go a great deal further than that; I am quite sure of it. Quite sure, I mean, that I never saw any man so handsome. And more than that, I really cannot believe that there ever was anybody more handsome."

"Mercy on me, Janet! If I am not a very imprudent middle-aged woman indeed, I ought to be exceedingly frightened at hearing you say so. Here am I, for the first time in my life, undertaking the care of a young lady, and the very first decided opinion that I hear from her is, that she thinks a young man who is staying in the house with her is the very handsomest person she ever saw in her life! What can I expect after this, but that your next confidential communication, Miss Janet, will be that you are vehemently in love with him?"

"Then you must be the more careful of me, Mrs. Mathews," replied Janet, very solemnly. "Of course you know such a young girl as I am, brought up in the mountains, too, must be very much in want of some kind friend to look after me in such very dangerous circumstances."

"Unquestionably, my poor child," replied Mrs. Mathews, in the same tone; "and I will endeavour to do my duty under these circumstances—which certainly are somewhat critical."

And having said this, Mrs. Mathews changed the subject, and nothing more was said on that occasion respecting Mr. Stephen Cornington; but the conversation fell back upon books, both new and old, and Mrs. Mathews discovered with more satisfaction than surprise, that this young daughter of John Anderson, notwithstanding her having been brought up in the mountains, was by no means very particularly ignorant for her age; and moreover that she had already formed a pretty decided opinion upon the comparative advantages of being permitted to read as much as she liked in a room sacred to herself, and the having to sit in a drawing-room, with a rosewood box, lined with satin,

containing all materials for lady-like stitching on one side, a Book of Beauty and a newspaper on the other, and one or two companions *en face*, with equally elegant employment for their fingers, and with very amiable readiness to discuss confidentially the affairs and the merits of their neighbours.

But amidst all the talk that ensued between them, and during which these peculiarities in the character of Janet were made manifest to Mrs. Mathews, it never occurred to that lady that she might enlighten the mind of her young friend in return by giving her a few hints as to the peculiarities of those with whom she was likely to become acquainted in her new home.

Her silence on this point, however, did not arise from indifference either as to the merits of her neighbours, or as to the effect they might be likely to produce on her young companion; but on the first point, the more decided her own opinions might be (and the opinions of Mrs. Mathews were very decided), the less desirous did she feel to discuss them; and as to the second, she was inclined to think that the education of a young mind was more effectually forwarded by leaving it to form its own judgments, subject to the wholesome correction of experience, than by enforcing upon it the judgments of another.

This notion, perhaps, was not absolutely unreasonable on the part of Mrs. Mathews, as far as the mental development of Janet Anderson was concerned; but her reasonings on the subject cannot apply to my readers, and before I take the liberty of requesting them to accompany my heroine and her adopted daughter amongst the persons who formed the society of the Weldon neighbourhood, I think it desirable that I should give something like a *catalogue raisonné* of the more prominent individuals of the circle.

Enough has been already said concerning Sir Charles Otterborne, his lady, and his son, who must of course be put at the head of the list, as being the only titled family within visiting distance of the Grange, to enable the reader to know something of them.

The next mansion which suggests itself is that of the clergyman. His family consisted of himself, his wife, daughter, and son. And nothing could be more harmonious than the manner in which this little family lived together. The interests, the opinions, the tastes, the gentle friendships, and the gentle enmities of one, were the interests, the opinions, the tastes, the gentle friendships, and the gentle enmities of all.

Mr. Price had not married early in life, having waited for a college living, and he was at least a dozen years older than his lady ; but this disparity did not appear in the least degree to interfere with the very pleasant domestic harmony which existed between them. They were, indeed, both of them blessed with easy, quiet tempers, such as would render domestic altercation not only painful but really difficult ; and at the time of their marriage all the world might have been challenged in vain to produce an individual who would have testified to the fact that either Mr. Price or his bride had ever been known to contradict or dispute any matter of opinion that had ever been brought before them.

But this was before the appearance of the Oxford Tracts.

The case was altered now. Both Mr. and Mrs. Price, as well as their son and daughter, approved the Oxford Tracts very much ; and though it was not in their nature to be noisy on any subject, they appeared, though not noisy, to be very much in earnest on this.

Mr. and Mrs. Price, Miss Price, and Mr. William Price, were all rather handsome, and they were all of them constantly very neatly dressed, and, when in company, the ladies were really elegant, that is to say, as far as the sum allowed them for dress, would permit ; for neither of the family ever contracted a debt which there was any danger of their being unable to pay. Their income, indeed, was a very comfortable one ; the living of Weldon, besides the house, garden, and fifteen acres of glebe, was worth seven or eight hundred a year ; in addition to which, Mr. Price had a pretty little property, which brought him about three hundred more : and Mrs. Price, who was a Smitherton, and granddaughter to the late Lord Thompson, had also a fortune of six thousand pounds ; so that altogether the Prices were very well off, and fully able to take and keep a place among the country gentlemen of the neighbourhood. And of course, as she, and her son, and her daughter, occasionally observed, Mrs. Price's noble blood assisted very considerably in giving them consideration in the county.

The next family that I shall mention bore the name of Steyton, of Steyton Lodge. They were decidedly the most wealthy people in that part of the country ; and as their family consisted of one only daughter, their style of living might be, and indeed was, extremely handsome, without their being accused of extravagance. Moreover, Emily Steyton was a very beautiful girl ; and a very beautiful girl of twenty, with a

fortune of several thousands per annum, is quite enough to give *éclat* to any house; so that Steyton Lodge ranked very high among the mansions of the neighbourhood.

There is only one individual more whom I shall name at present among the particular friends and intimates of the Mathews family, though there were two or three other houses at which they occasionally visited; this one individual was a Roman Catholic priest. This gentleman had for many years been librarian to a nobleman of the same persuasion, who had a very magnificent mansion in a neighbouring parish.

But Lord Proctor's family were in the habit of making the London season a very long one; and, moreover, they rarely or never failed to pass a month or two in every year abroad; so that it was not the custom of the country gentlemen's families in their vicinity to take the liberty of considering them as neighbours in any sense of the word; and in fact they never mixed at all in their society.

But not so the guardian of their noble library. The responsibility attached to this charge was, of itself, quite enough to give Mr. Cuthbridge great importance in the eyes of his employer; but he was, moreover, the family chaplain, and performed a daily mass in the chapel of Proctor Castle. He was treated with the very highest consideration and respect by every individual of the noble family to whose service he had devoted himself, and every care was taken that, during the long intervals in which the family were absent, his residence in the castle should be made as comfortable as possible.

A good horse was kept exclusively for his use, and his love for flowers, which was a marked feature in his character, was as carefully attended to, in the decoration of the magnificent library in which he chiefly lived, as if he had been the master of the castle instead of its librarian.

The whole neighbourhood were extremely civil and attentive to him, his agreeable conversation, and gentleman-like manner, insured this; and very rarely was any dinner-party given in the neighbourhood to which he was not invited. But this would not have sufficed to bring him into this list of Weldon worthies, had it not happened that he was a particular friend and favourite of Mrs. Mathews.

Mr. Mathews liked him very much, because he was always so very neatly dressed, and had such very gentlemanlike-looking hands, almost as handsome, Mr. Mathews thought, as his own.

Mr. King liked him very much, too, partly because he had known him so long, and partly because he had for years been in the habit of bringing such beautiful flowers to "Mary."

But Mrs. Mathews liked him a great deal more than they did, or perhaps than anybody else in the whole neighbourhood, and there was good reason for it, for Mr. Cuthbridge had not only been always very kind to her, but he had been very useful also. With her immense perseverance, it might be wrong to say that she could not have acquired all she knew without his assistance, but certain it is that she could not have acquired it so easily; neither would the task have been so often a pleasant one as with his friendly assistance she had found it.

Whatever might have been the difference of opinion between them on religious subjects, none of the friends and acquaintance on either side had any opportunity of judging; for not only had no word approaching to a discussion on the subject been ever heard between them, during any of the long colloquies which they were sure to hold together at every party at which they met, but neither of them had ever been heard upon any occasion to allude to the religious opinions of the other, during the many years of intimacy that had existed between them.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

IMMEDIATELY after luncheon, the party from Weldon Grange set off to make their projected visit at the Manor-house. Old Mr. King was left to the especial care of Sally Spicer, who promised her mistress that he should not be permitted to sit on the favourite bench one minute after the air began to "feel too fresh to be good for him."

Having received this solemn assurance, Mrs. Mathews with an easy conscience set off upon her drive with a feeling of unspeakable enjoyment from having Janet Anderson seated beside her in the carriage. The handsome grandfather and the handsome grandson, both extremely well mounted, caracoled beside them, and then it was that, perhaps for the first time,

my heroine became fully aware of the advantage of uniting two incomes for purposes of domestic accommodation, for without this she could not have taken Janet Anderson out with her so pleasantly.

On arriving at the Manor-house they found that the gentlemen had already been admitted to Lady Otterborne's morning-room, and her ladyship was still engaged in listening to Mr. Mathews' rather confused, and rather elaborate account of the unexpected arrival of his grandson.

Lady Otterborne always received Mrs. Mathews with marked kindness, and she did so now; and the tall delicate-looking girl in deep mourning, who was introduced by the lady of Weldon Grange as "a very dear young friend," was also received with a smile so gentle and so courteous, as to put her much more at her ease than she had hoped to be in any fine lady's English house that she was likely to enter.

There was a sort of meek gentleness of manner in Lady Otterborne, partly the result of her natural temper, and partly of the habitual indifference which is apt to grow upon quiet, undemonstrative people, when they live with others who are most particularly the reverse.

Sir Charles Otterborne might indeed very truly be said to be the reverse of his lady in all things. She was by nature affectionate, kind, and what the French most expressively term *serviable*; for she was prone to help all those who wanted help; and where this divine feeling is genuine and strong, there is little or no propensity to magnify the promptings of polite civility into a fictitious imitation of it.

But with Sir Charles the case was different. There was no truth in him. He was naturally, systematically, and habitually false; and, moreover, his manner was as completely the reverse of hers, as were his feelings; for his demonstrations were pretty nearly as vehement as they were false.

Many people, nay, perhaps most people of Lady Otterborne's acquaintance considered her as cold, and very reserved, whereas the majority classed Sir Charles among the most warm-hearted and frank-natured of mortals.

Mrs. Mathews certainly was not one of this majority. She did not think Sir Charles Otterborne frank-natured, neither was she greatly disposed to give him credit for any very kindly warmth of heart; but the drum-like hollowness of his demonstrative cordiality was more perceptible to her acuteness than was the real nature of his tranquil-seeming wife.

Mrs. Mathews, indeed, had often felt a sort of suspicion that there was more of deep feeling in the heart of the pale and anxious looking Lady Otterborne than she chose to make visible to ordinary eyes.

But she never felt very sure about it; she felt, too, that there was no such intimacy of friendship between them as could justify her endeavouring to discover more of her ladyship's feelings than it was her wish to disclose, and she therefore very quietly permitted herself to remain in doubt as to whether Lady Otterborne was one of the most admirable and self-forgetting human beings that ever lived, or only a very tranquil-tempered woman, whose object was to pass through life without giving herself any more trouble about anything than was absolutely necessary.

Before the servant who announced Mrs. Mathews retired, he was ordered to let Sir Charles know that Mr. Mathews was there, and having given this order she seemed to think herself at liberty to give her whole attention to the ladies of the party, although she certainly was aware that Mr. Mathews had not concluded the interesting little romance he had been relating concerning his grandson.

But Lady Otterborne in her quiet way was rather apt to look unconscious as to when Mr. Mathews was talking and when he was not, and it was probably because he was used to this that he now appeared to endure it with such great indifference; for no sooner had she withdrawn her attention from him and devoted it wholly to his wife, than he rose from his chair with an air of the most perfect good humour and contentment, and taking his grandson by the arm led him to the windows, whence he dilated on the beauty of the park they overlooked, with as much apparent interest as if the premises had been his own.

Mrs. Mathews meanwhile did not deem it necessary to enter into any very detailed explanations respecting her young companion. She introduced her as "Miss Anderson, the daughter of an old friend who had formerly been well known in the neighbourhood."

Lady Otterborne looked at her for a moment with her large dark eyes, the tranquil expression of which often left the observer doubtful whether the look betokened a meditative sort of interest in what she looked at, or an absent mind occupied in something that had no connection with it.

On the present occasion, Mrs. Mathews could not help flattering herself that the former interpretation would be the

right one; for her ladyship smiled, offered the young lady a hand, and placed her in a chair that accidentally stood almost in front of the sofa on which she had herself been sitting, and on which she now placed Mrs. Mathews beside her.

It certainly was a fact, and no delusion of Mrs. Mathews' partiality, that Janet Anderson was a very lovely girl, and her beauty had that sort of interest in it which leads people—women as much as men perhaps—to find amusement in looking at it, and in watching the expression of the features. And it was doubtless for this reason that Lady Otterborne repeatedly fixed her gentle eyes upon her, and repeatedly spoke to her, too, and that with a greater appearance of interest than she generally displayed. And in this there was certainly nothing extraordinary, and if Mrs. Mathews had been in all respects a wise woman, she would scarcely have been so very much delighted by it, for assuredly there are few things better worth looking at than a beautiful young girl, perfectly unaffected in aspect and demeanour, and equally removed in manner both from shyness and presumption—and such was Janet Anderson.

"Mathews! my good fellow! How are you?" cried the very loud voice of a very stout, tall man, for whom a servant threw widely open the door of the room in which Lady Otterborne and her guests were sitting, "Egad, it is an age since I set eyes upon you!"

"That was because you were in the metropolis, Sir Charles," replied Mr. Mathews, almost tottering under the touch of the heavy hand which welcomed him. "You may be very sure that I have paid my duty here repeatedly; but London, London, London!—that is our rival, Sir Charles. And who can wonder? Where men are formed to shine in a higher sphere, they seldom feel contented in a lower one."

"I don't know about that, Mathews; I am passionately fond of the country,—I am, upon my soul; you know I am. But who is this handsome spark that you have brought to see me? Any relation, Mathews?"

"Does the likeness strike you, my dear Sir Charles?" replied Mr. Mathews, with a smile of ineffable delight. "I thought it would! Upon my word I did! You have such uncommon quickness!"

"You are a capital good fellow, Mathews, always. But you have not told me who this young gentleman is," returned the puzzled baronet.

"He is my grandson, Sir Charles. His name is Stephen

Cornington. He is my grandson, and I cannot help saying, that I think he is very like me. Very like what I was, you know, Sir Charles. Everybody says so, I hear. And he is not an ill-looking young fellow, is he, Sir Charles?"

"Ill-looking! No, upon my soul he beats my black-browed boy hollow, in looks. Your grandson, is he? Well, I wish you joy of him; you must make him one of the 'Hunt,' Mathews. We want some young fellows amongst us. Have you got a good seat, Coddington? We ride like devils, I can tell you."

"Cornington, Sir Charles, if you please, not Coddington. My young grandson has no right to the name of Coddington."

"Well, it's all one, you know." replied the baronet, moving his heavy bulk onward towards Mrs. Mathews, and caring much too little about her husband to express or to feel the least surprise at the sudden appearance of this grandson.

"Good morning, Sir Charles," said Mrs. Mathews, accepting his offered hand, because she could not avoid it, for most cordially did she dislike him.

The baronet, however, punished her as usual for her disimulation, by making her arm ache from the wrist to the shoulder by his salutation.

"And who have you brought to us, my good madam," said he, fixing his pale but very impertinent eyes upon Janet,—"Is this fair creature your granddaughter?"

"No, Sir Charles," replied Mrs. Mathews, very quietly, "this young lady is Miss Anderson."

"Miss Anderson! Is she indeed? I beg your pardon, Miss Anderson, I really did not know you, you are so much grown since we met last, you know, that you must excuse me. I hope I see you perfectly well."

And as he spoke he took her hand, which he held with disagreeable tightness, though he did not shake it so vehemently as he had done that of her friend. But Janet looked and felt embarrassed, not only from the unpleasant pressure of her poor little hand, but because she thought that she was called upon to confess that she had never enjoyed the honour of seeing him before.

She looked at Mrs. Mathews, but the countenance of that lady did not enlighten her upon the manner of conduct she ought to pursue. In truth, Mrs. Mathews was so familiar with the fact that Sir Charles Otterborne, while affecting the most affectionate intimacy with his neighbours, often in reality

scarcely knew some of them by sight, that she was in no degree surprised at his pretending to have seen Janet before, neither did she think it worth her while to suggest any answer which might enlighten him as to the blunder which he had made.

But Lady Otterborne, upon perceiving that her pretty new acquaintance looked really uncomfortable under the eye and in the grasp of Sir Charles, kindly made an effort to release her from both, by saying,—

“Do you know where Herbert is, Sir Charles? He is always vexed if Mrs. Mathews calls without his seeing her. Will you be kind enough to ring the bell?”

This was one of those feminine requests which, as a matter of course, must always be obeyed as an implicit command, and Sir Charles Otterborne accordingly released the hand of Janet Anderson and rang the bell.

“Is Mr. Otterborne at home?” demanded her ladyship of the servant who answered it.

“Yes, my lady, Mr. Herbert is in the greenhouse,” was the reply.

“Then tell him that I wish him to come here,” said Lady Otterborne.

“Yes, that is quite right, my dear,” said Sir Charles, as the servant disappeared. “It is quite right that he should come and pay his compliments to our good friends. And now, Mrs. Mathews, I think we may venture to say that my son and heir may look even at that beautiful young lady with impunity; for I am happy to announce that all the preliminaries for his marriage with our lovely neighbour—the matchless Emily Steyton—are concluded; and I shall not only have the richest heiress in the county for my daughter-in-law, but the most beautiful girl also; for even in the presence of this charming young lady I may say so, because she is hardly old enough yet, I should think, to enter the lists for the apple.”

“I thank you a thousand times, Sir Charles, for being yourself the proclaimer of this delightful intelligence,” said Mr. Mathews, rubbing his hands with an air of infinite glee. “I will not deny,” he continued, “that I had heard some rumour of the kind before, but now I shall feel at liberty to proclaim it without any fear of contradiction.”

“That you certainly may, my dear Mathews,” returned Sir Charles. “And won’t I,” he continued, flourishing his right hand over his head in most triumphant fashion—“won’t I

make the country ring from end to end ! Eighty thousand !—eighty thousand clear, Mr. Mathews !—not a cent. less, take my word for it ; and you may well guess that I have thought it worth my while to inquire a little about it. Eighty thousand, Sir ! and decidedly the handsomest woman in the county. It is an immense match ! an immense match, Mr. Mathews. But it is suitable in every way ; for though I think Herbert is hardly worthy to be his father's son in point of looks—for to say the honest truth he is almost as black as a Spaniard, yet I am told that there are lots of people who are ready to swear that he is superbly handsome. And, as to fortune, every one knows what the Otterborne rent-roll is, as well as the thousands which have come to add to it from her ladyship's side. Nor are we very badly off, I believe, in the article of pedigree. However that signifies but little when everything else is right."

He continued to run on, in the same boastful style, for some time longer, Mr. Mathews listening to him as to a being of a very superior order indeed ; and Stephen gazing at him, and listening to him also, but with a good deal more of critical speculation.

The young gentleman, in truth, seemed to be studying his character, while the mind of his grandfather appeared to content itself with the simple act of admiration.

"What a fine place this is to be sure !" said Stephen, after earnestly looking out of the window for a minute or two. "And it seems so complete, too," he added. " Didn't I see a billiard-table, Sir, in one of the rooms near the entrance ?"

"Yes, to be sure you did," replied Sir Charles. "Who could live without a billiard-table ? But what do you know about billiards, my young Sir ?"

"Not very much, Sir," returned the young man, very modestly ; "though I love to push the balls about too."

"Come along, then, my fine fellow," cried the baronet. "Let us see what you are made of. Egad unless I play with myself, I never hear the sound of a ball here for months together."

And, hereupon, he took the well-pleased Stephen by the arm, and followed by the equally well-pleased grandfather, led the way to his perfectly well-appointed billiard-room.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE heir of the mansion had not been summoned in vain. It would have been difficult indeed for his mother to have called him at any moment when he would not have been ready to come to her, but the hearing that his friend, Mrs. Mathews, was with her, rendered the summons particularly welcome; for, strange as it may seem, this middle-aged gentlewoman was perhaps the most intimate friend he had in the neighbourhood.

Nevertheless the knowing that she was in the drawing-room retarded his arrival there for several minutes; for as the summons found him in the greenhouse, he could not leave it till he had collected for her a magnificent bouquet of all that was loveliest and sweetest among his treasures. Having achieved this greatly to his own satisfaction, he entered the room with both hands so filled with flowers that he was unable to welcome her with either.

I have already said that the young man was like his mother, and most particularly unlike his father; and certainly the light and graceful figure which now entered the room was as perfect a contrast to the heavy clumsy one which had just left it as could well be imagined. Yet even the form was perhaps less strikingly dissimilar than the face,—for, at any rate, they were both tall men. But in that portion of each that has been well termed *le chef*, whatever seemed wanting in the one was precisely what was most remarkable in the other. In the father, whatever there might be of intellectual, seemed buried and overpowered, as it were, by what was animal; whereas, in the son, so striking was the development of the very noblest order of intellect, that the eloquent features only seemed given to assist the expression of it.

It was easy to perceive, by the very first words that were exchanged between Herbert Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews, that the acquaintance between them had reached a degree of intimacy which greatly exceeded what appeared to exist between any other members of their respective families. It is true, indeed, that Sir Charles called his neighbour "Mathews," and that my heroine displayed no similar familiarity, for she did not address the son of Sir Charles either as "Herbert" or as "Otterborne."

The first words the young man uttered as he approached his friend, and laid his fragrant offering on her lap, were the names of sundry rare twigs,—which to the uninitiated would have appeared the least valuable part of the collection, but which she evidently welcomed with extreme satisfaction, immediately drawing them forth as he named them, from the others, and depositing them sacred and apart upon a table within reach. This done, she accepted some worsted, good-humouredly held ready by Lady Otterborne ; and having assured herself of the safety of both her precious and her beautiful bouquets, she at length found herself sufficiently at leisure to offer him a hand, which she did with an air of very cordial affection, saying at the same time in a tone but little above a whisper, “ Let me wish you joy, my dear young friend. Your father has announced the news. God bless you ! May you be as happy as I am sure you deserve to be ! ”

But much as Mrs. Mathews was engrossed by her flowers and her friend, she would not so far have forgotten Janet as to leave her thus long without presenting the young man to her, had not this ceremony been very graciously performed by his lady mother during the few moments that Mrs. Mathews had devoted, by necessity, to the flowers, in order to prevent their falling from her lap upon the ground.

The eyes of Herbert, though very like both in colour and shape to those of his mother, had not as yet the expression of tranquil abstraction which seemed to have settled upon hers.

The first glance at a very pretty girl will suffice most men, whether young or old, to certify the fact ; and even as Herbert walked across the room with his flowers, though his eyes were certainly directed to the old friend for whom they were intended, he became aware that the young stranger seated beside her was beautiful.

But when his mother’s introduction justified his looking more directly at her face, the expression of his own caused Lady Otterborne to smile, for it had less of admiration than of surprise. Yet, why should Herbert Otterborne feel surprise at seeing a beautiful girl in his mother’s drawing-room ? The spectacle was not a new one to him,—for he was at that moment engaged to be married to one of the loveliest young women in the world.

But so it was ; and when his mother asked him, jestingly, afterwards, why it was that he had looked so astonished, he did not deny the fact, but replied with great *naïveté* that he thought

there was something very remarkable about her, and that he did not recollect having ever seen anyone like her before.

Such was Herbert Otterborne's first observation on the subject of Janet Anderson.

Janet Anderson's first observation on the subject of Herbert Otterborne was, that she did not think he liked to be congratulated on his approaching marriage; for that pale as he was, he turned paler still when it was mentioned.

This remark was made to Mrs. Mathews as they drove home together; but she made no reply to it, only taking that opportunity of asking her young friend what she thought of his appearance.

"He struck you, then, as looking very pale, Janet, did he?" said she.

"Yes, certainly," replied Janet; "I think he is very pale indeed."

"Do you mean to say, my dear, that you think Mr. Otterborne looks out of health?" inquired Mrs. Mathews.

"No. There is nothing sickly-looking about him, I think," replied Janet.

"But from what you say, I suppose you think him too pale to be at all handsome?" observed her companion. Janet was silent for a moment; and then replied, "I do not think *that* has anything to do with being handsome. Lady Otterborne is very pale,—but everybody must think her handsome, I suppose."

"Yes, that is very true; I believe everyone does think so," returned Mrs. Mathews,—and at the same moment the two gentlemen who had left the Manor-house a few minutes after the carriage, passed and bowed to them. "That is the style of manly beauty that you most admire, Janet," said Mrs. Mathews, laughing, as she gave a glance towards Stephen Cornington.

"Dearest Mrs. Mathews!" exclaimed Janet, colouring violently, "what can make you think so?"

"Your having said this morning that you thought him the handsomest person you had ever seen. Do you not remember it?" said Mrs. Mathews, quietly.

After the pause of half a moment, Janet replied, "Yes, I remember it."

"And I presume, my dear, that you meant what you said, did you not? It did not appear to me that you were joking. You do think Mr. Stephen Cornington the handsomest man you ever saw, do you not?"

"Upon my word, dearest Mrs. Mathews, I can hardly tell

you," replied poor Janet, looking sorely puzzled. But the next moment she added, with recovered ease and very perfect sincerity, "Your question seems a very plain one, and yet I am puzzled how to answer it. I believe I was in earnest when I said so; and yet I scarcely think I could have been either, for it seems to me now that I am not of the same opinion at all."

"Well, never mind, Janet. It is one of the many subjects upon which young ladies have the happy privilege of changing their opinions as often as they like."

And then Mrs. Mathews broke off the conversation, in order to devote all her attention to her flowers; and very happy was she to find that Janet was by no means so ignorant as she expected to find her on that subject, but that she had been mistress of a little garden of her own, and that she loved it as dearly as Mrs. Mathews herself could have done.

The two gentlemen, meanwhile, made as much use of their *tête-à-tête* as the ladies. That is to say, they were exceedingly conversable.

"That's a fine place, my dear boy," said the old gentleman, making his gentle little ambling filly approach closely to that of his gay grandson.

"Yes, Sir, it is. It is a place that gives one a good notion of the people that have it. They must have plenty of the ready, father, eh?"

"Why they have, now, Stephen, thanks to a large fortune unexpectedly left to my lady. But before that came, the baronet was pretty hard up, as we say."

"And as we say, too, father, when people go rather faster than their income can follow them. This Sir Charles, now, I should think, had been a famous rattling chap in his day?"

"And he is a famous rattling chap still, Stephen, if all we hear of him be true. *Rattling*, in more senses than one, I am afraid; for they say he is never perfectly happy unless he has got a dice-box in his hands."

"He does not play like a raw hand at billiards, either, Sir, I can tell you that; and yet I think I could bowl a few yellow boys out of him, if I had the money to stake."

"Well, my dear fellow, you shan't lose the sport and the pleasure for want of a few sovereigns to make a show with. But even if you play better than he does, I shall think a great deal less of that than of the sort of credit that would be got in the county by your being a good deal at the Manor-house. They are decidedly the first people in the neighbourhood for

real aristocratical consequence; for my Lord Proctor, at the Castle, is never considered as really belonging to our neighbourhood."

" You have got a lord here too, have you, Sir ? " said Stephen, rather eagerly.

" Don't use such a phrase as that in speaking of a nobleman, Stephen," said his gentleman-like companion, looking a good deal shocked.

" My dear father, it was only in joke you know ! " returned Stephen, smiling so brightly, and looking so superlatively handsome, that Mr. Mathews again gazed at him with unmixed satisfaction.

" Oh ! then that's all very well," he resumed ; " but as I was telling you, Sir Charles Otterborne's family is considered quite the first, as to station, in the neighbourhood. Mr. Steyton, of the Lodge, though, I believe, is about a hundred times as rich—that is, as far as ready money goes ; but his money was all got by trade, you know, and Sir Charles' land came into the family after the holy wars, I believe, or something like it."

" Oh ! " responded Stephen, in a tone which might be understood to indicate a perfect understanding of the subject, or something approaching contempt for it. But there was no mistaking the genuine meaning of his next speech, for it was with a sort of overflowing sincerity that he exclaimed—

" Well ! after all, father, there is nothing so pleasant to deal with as ready cash ! What sort of a chap is this lucky Mr. Steyton ? "

" Chap ! my dear boy," replied Mr. Mathews, laughing ; " this chap, as you are pleased to call him, is about the most pompous fellow that you ever saw in your whole life. Old Mr. King says that he wonders Steyton does not contrive to get a little air manufactured on purpose for his own private use, for that he always looks as if he thought what he was breathing was not good enough for him."

" Capital joke that ! Well said, old King ! " replied Stephen, with another of his beautiful smiles. " But I say, daddy," he continued—playfully passing his arm under that of the old gentleman, much as if they had been walking together—" tell me, will you, something about the beautiful heiress that is going to marry that blackamoor young squire at the Manor-house."

" All I can tell you about her, my dear boy," replied Mr.

Mathews, "is, that her name is Emily Steyton ; that she is the most beautiful girl that ever was seen, and that her father intends to give her eighty thousand pounds down. And many people say that she will have three times as much at his death —for he has neither chick nor child, except this beautiful Miss Emily."

The young man was silent for a minute or two, and then said—

"Wasn't it a pity, Sir, that I did not happen to come here a little earlier ? I don't see why I might not have had as good a chance of pleasing Miss Emily as that black-and-white fellow yonder. Upon my soul, if he had but a short face instead of a long one, I should suspect that he had a little negro blood in him. I won't pretend to say that his hair is exactly like wool, but yet it does curl uncommon short round the back of his neck—doesn't it, Sir ? "

"Yes, Stephen, it does indeed ; but I believe many young ladies think that very beautiful. However, I am a little of your opinion. I like your curls best, that blow about your face and shine in the sun almost like gold. But there is no accounting for taste, you know. I do wish that I had had my picture taken when I was just your age, and then you would be able to judge yourself of the likeness that I see so very plainly myself."

"Oh, for that matter, I see it, too, Sir—I do, upon my honour !" replied Stephen ; "I am sure everybody with eyes must see it. My grandmother always said so. But I say, father, we don't know yet that this prize of a girl is so very overhead and ears in love with Blacky, as you seem to fancy. Your Sir Charles is a knowing one—take my word for that—and likely enough to have cooked up all the whole thing himself. I should like to have a try for it, daddy. Who knows ? You don't know what a fuss the girls make about me, Sir. They do, upon my soul !"

Mr. Mathews looked at him, and laughed.

"That's not unlikely, Stephen," said he ; "I remember a little about that sort of thing myself. But you forget, my dear boy, that you can't make any Joan a Lady, as young Otterborne can. That makes a terrible difference, Stephen, in the eyes of fathers as well as daughters. So I am afraid that scheme won't answer. But if that does not some other may, you know. What say you, now, to Miss Janet Anderson ? I have a great notion that she will have a very handsome for-

tune of her own, because my wife draws herself up so stiffly when I allude to the subject ; and all I have been able to get out of her is, that the young lady's fortune is in the hands of trustees. Of course, it is, you know, as she is such a young thing ; but if she had no fortune at all, we should hear nothing about trustees, you may be sure of that. However, by hook or by crook we shall be able to find out something more particular on that point ; and you must not fall in love with her, Stephen, till we do. For though you will be very well off, my dear fellow, when we are both dead, it won't do for you to fall in love with any girl that has not got a good deal of money, you know. But this Miss Janet is very pretty, isn't she, Stephen ?"

"Why, no, Sir, I can't say I think so," replied the young man, colouring. "I don't mean to say," he added, "that she has not good features, and her skin is as white as milk ; but I don't like the look of her for all that. There is something in her eyes—I dare say you'll tell me that they are very handsome, the colour of a violet, and all that sort of thing ; but I don't like the look of her, for all that. I'll be hanged if she is not as cold as ice, and as stupid as an owl. I can't bear that sort of girl."

"Well, well ! we need not be in a hurry, you know. We must make something or other of you, I suppose, before we can hope to find you a rich wife. What should you like to be, Stephen ? I know I shall hate to part with you, my dear boy ; but people would blame me, you know, if I did not give you some profession. What should you like, Stephen ?"

"Why, it seems to me, Sir, that one ought to think a good deal about it before one fixes," replied the young man, very gravely. "It would not do, Sir, to make a choice, and then change one's mind afterwards."

"That is a very sensible observation, my dear boy, it is indeed ; and it is one that I shall feel it my duty to attend to, and keep in mind. And while we are thinking about it, Stephen, you will find plenty of things to amuse you here, and plenty of nice people to get acquainted with ; and the more you know the better, for when you have fixed, you may find country friends very useful. It is the only way to get interest."

"The more people I get acquainted with the better I shall be pleased," replied Stephen, gaily. "I am sure, Sir, you were never born to be a humdrum, and it is a shame that you ever

should be one. And I suspect that I am too much like you to be easily made one either. But you have married a wife that is a great deal too old for you, father, that's the worst of it."

Mr. Mathews looked at him as he said this with more than grand-paternal affection, and with a deeper conviction than ever that no two men were ever so like each other before, except in the case of twin-brothers.

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## CHAPTER XXV

THE residence of Mr. Price, the clergyman, who was at that time in possession of the valuable living of Weldon, was so near the Grange that Mrs. Mathews walked thither on the following day, after luncheon, in order to introduce Janet to the family

This Price family have been already described, and no further preface is therefore necessary before Janet's presentation to them.

The young man was not at home—but the father, mother, and daughter were sitting together, the very model of family harmony ; Mrs. Price and her fair, light-haired daughter, Louisa, being both at work upon the same magnificent hearth-rug, and both putting theirworsted ends into the same little snow-white miniature basket, lined with blue satin to match the lining of the large basket which contained the many-tinted mass which stood ready for their needles ; while Mr. Price was reading to them a few select paragraphs from the *Morning Post*.

"How do you do ? dearest Mrs. Mathews ! How very kind of you !" said Mrs. Price, extending both her hands.

"How *very* kind of you !" echoed the fair Louisa, extending both hers.

The presentation of Janet followed ; and no stranger ever received a more smiling welcome, for the teeth of father, mother, and daughter—all, for their respective ages, particularly handsome—were fully displayed to do her honour.

And then began the neighbourly chit-chat.

"You have heard the news, I presume, my dear lady ?" said

Mr. Price, with the tone of a person who takes real interest in the subject discussed. "The Manor-house and the Lodge? Of course, you know that it is all settled?"

"Yes, Mr. Price, Sir Charles announced it to us yesterday," replied Mrs. Mathews.

Mr. Price smiled, and nodded with a look of great intelligence.

"No wonder, my good lady; no wonder. It is always pleasant to tell pleasant tidings. The entrance of such a young lady as Miss Emily Steyton into a family might occasion joy anywhere. But *HERE*, you know!" And having said this, Mr. Price nodded his head, and then shook his head, and then nodded again, his eyes being fixed on Mrs. Mathews all the time, as if quite certain that she comprehended all he meant to express.

She gave no indication of this, however, but looked very much as she might have done had she been made of iron or stone.

"It will be a very gay affair, I suppose," said Mrs. Price,—taking up, as it were her husband's nodding process, and going on with it.

"Have you almost finished your rug, Miss Louisa?" said Mrs. Mathews to the daughter of the house, who had never suspended for a moment the action of her needle, though the sympathetic movement of her flaxen head showed that she, too, took a lively interest in the conversation.

All the energy of her character, however, was immediately turned into another channel by the question of Mrs. Mathews. "Finished! Why, dear Mrs. Mathews, we only began it this time twelvemonth! I don't think any one can accuse either mamma or me of being idle; but I can't even pretend to guess when it will be finished. I believe you forget that it is all tent stitch."

"Yes, I did," said Mrs. Mathews,

"Oh! that just makes all the difference, you know. Is Miss Anderson a worker?"

"Not much, I believe," said Mrs. Mathews,—who, by-the-by, had never made any inquiry on the subject, and knew no more of Janet's propensities in that line than those of her grandmother.

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Mathews," said Janet, reproachfully; "I am a very great worker. I make everything I wear."

Why Mrs. Mathews should frown so very harshly upon

hearing this, poor Janet could not tell, neither could she guess why she should be so rude as to say to her, "Nonsense, my dear! You should never tell fibs, Janet Anderson, even in jest."

It is possible that Janet might have attempted some defence against this vehement attack upon her veracity, which was as undeserved, as it was unexpected; for Janet very literally had made everything she had on "*pour cause*," to borrow a significant phrase; for if she had not, her mantua-maker's bill must have been paid by charity. But no opportunity was afforded her, for Mrs. Mathews, rather abruptly turning her back upon her, addressed Mr. Price: "I suppose this wedding will take place in London, Sir?"

This looked very much as if Mrs. Mathews was not in a good humour; for, as she probably knew perfectly well, it would have been very difficult for her to have said anything more painfully grating to the feelings of Mr. Price than these words.

Mr. Price's wishes were probably none of them very vehement or impassioned; but rarely or never had he wished anything more earnestly than that the heir of the Manor-house and the heiress of the Lodge should be united in the bands of holy matrimony in his church, and that he himself should pronounce the nuptial benediction.

"Did Sir Charles say so?" demanded he, with his usual gentle accent, but not without betraying a little agitation.

"I am not quite sure whether he did or not," replied his tormentor; "but it is much more likely, I think, than that they should be married here."

Poor Miss Louisa actually turned pale as she listened to these words; for she was honoured by the intended bride with a greater degree of intimacy than she bestowed upon any other young lady in the neighbourhood, and in her very heart of hearts she had both hoped and expected that she should be selected as one of the bridesmaids. Had Mrs. Mathews happened to look at her at that moment, instead of looking at her mother, she would hardly have had the cruelty to persevere in her fabulous statement, for the woe-begone expression of her pretty little face was piteous to behold; but, unfortunately, the attention of Mrs. Mathews was just then attracted to the generally very unmeaning countenance of her mamma, but which, at that moment, was considerably less unmeaning than usual, for her eyes were earnestly directed to the thin, and not very new black silk of which poor Janet's home-made suit was

composed, and there was much too decided an expression of scorn in the curl of her lip, for her countenance to have been called unmeaning at that moment.

Mrs. Mathews saw it all, and understood it all, which might be an evidence, perhaps, of the acuteness of her observation ; but the result was certainly not an evidence of the goodness of her temper ; for, abruptly turning to Mr. Price, she said, in her clear, distinct voice, which rarely permitted any word she uttered to be unheard, or its meaning misunderstood, "Things seem to be going rather sharply against the Oxford gentry, Mr. Price, particularly in our neighbourhood, if all that I hear be true. I am told that Dr. Belton is to be the new dean, and he is positively the most thoroughly low-church divine that we have."

"Don't call him a divine, my good lady ! I do most humbly beg and intreat that I may not hear any such epithet applied to him ! We have field-preachers, Mrs. Mathews, field-preachers, and street-preachers in abundance, who are ten times more orthodox than he is !" cried Mr. Price, with a degree of vehemence that brought a deep flush to the very roots of his grey hair. "He is an absolute infidel on many points," he added, with a sigh, "and a most audacious dissenter on others—and as to the Rubric, I KNOW that he said.       "

"Never mind what he said, Mr. Price ; and if you will believe me, you had better begin to speak of him with a little more civility, and a great deal more caution ; for if they are going to make a dean of him now, you may be very sure that it will not be very long before he is made a bishop ; and when that is done, Mr. Price, I feel quite sure that your own sense of propriety will make you very sorry for anything you have ever spoken against him. You know, Sir, we are told that '*a bishop must be blameless*,' and that upon such authority as you will not choose to deny. But do not let us talk any more about it. There can be no doubt that Dr. Belton will be a bishop, and therefore the less we any of us say against him the better."

Poor Mr. Price was fortunately rather a thin man, and his pulse constitutionally beat time very temperately ; had it been otherwise he might have been in danger of an attack of apoplexy, for he was at that moment as greatly irritated as it was in his nature to be, and very justly too.

Perhaps Mrs. Mathews was aware of this ; for she suddenly let him alone, and was meditating making a generous atonement for all her misdemeanours by looking at and admiring

the immortal hearth-rug, when most unluckily she perceived that the eyes of Miss Louisa were now engaged precisely in the same manner that those of her mamma had been a few minutes before. In short, Mrs. Mathews very clearly perceived that the dress and accoutrements of John Anderson's daughter were undergoing a scrutiny which they were by no means particularly well calculated to stand, and this was a great deal more than it was in *her* nature to bear with patience. She felt it the more, too, because she was conscious that she had been herself most culpably unobservant on this point. She had looked, certainly more than once, in the face of Janet, and found it lovely ; she had studied its varying expression, and found more than one look that set her thinking a great deal more about the looks of the father in days past, than the dress of the daughter in days present. But this was her own fault, and not that of neat, nice, well-dressed Mrs. Price and her fair Louisa ; and had Mrs. Mathews been a little more reasonable, and a little less revengeful, she would not have left the Parsonage so mightily well-pleased with the idea of having made herself as disagreeable to its inhabitants as it was well possible for her to do, during the very moderate interval that she permitted her visit to last.

When people are out of temper they are very apt to make other people suffer from it, whether they deserve it or not—and this was most decidedly the case on the present occasion ; for during the walk from the Parsonage to the Grange, Mrs. Mathews scarcely spoke at all, and when she did, neither her words nor her tone had anything at all pleasant in them ; so that poor Janet, unconscious as she was of having done or said anything wrong, entered her room for the purpose of taking off her shabby, unstylish-looking little bonnet with the very painful conviction that her newly-found friend was angry with her.

Had Janet Anderson been blessed with father, mother, brothers, sisters, and a home, she would not have suffered as she now did from such a conviction, and her conscience, guiltless of intending offence, might have consoled her for having unwittingly given it. But her spirits were not yet in a condition to permit her being so philosophical, and so she sat down at her little table and wept.

She had not wept very long before her solitude was broken in upon by the entrance of Mrs. Mathews. She did not come, however, with any intention of apologising for her ill-humour, but solely upon a matter of business.

Mrs. Mathews certainly was rather angry with Janet. She was aware, good lady, though it was not very often that she subjected herself to self-examination on the subject, she was quite aware of being more indifferent to, and forgetful of, everything appertaining to dress than it was wise for any lady to be, but upon all such self-accusing occasions, she was wont to draw consolation from that great philosophical panacea, "It does not much signify."

Now, however, her estimate of the importance of this constitutional defect in her own formation was greatly changed, and she positively was ashamed of herself as she remembered that she had never once thought of the quality or fashion of Janet's still black attire, till her attention had been drawn to it by the expressive glances of Mrs. and Miss Price. And for this inattention on her own part she was very honestly angry with herself, but, to say the truth, she was at least equally angry with poor Janet.

"She should not have let me bring her down here without telling me that she had nothing fit to put on; or, if she has any garments better calculated to endure the scrutinizing glances of our reverend ladies, she had no business to go out as she did. I don't much like the idea of scolding her; but I must do it, and I will."

Such was the soliloquy by which Mrs. Mathews prepared herself to do her duty to John Anderson's daughter upon this very important point.

But the sight of her tears had the effect of very suddenly appeasing the wrath of her protectress, who, instead of scolding, kissed her, saying very gently, "What ails you, my sweet Janet? —why are you crying, my dear child?"

The face of Janet changed as suddenly as an April day when a shower is chased by the sun (a simile more apt than new), and most fervently returning the kiss, she exclaimed, "Then you are not angry with me?"

"No!" replied Mrs. Mathews, "I suppose I am not *very* angry, or I should not be so easily appeased. But tell me, Janet, why did you not make yourself a little smarter when you went to call upon those idiots? I told you they were idiots, I remember telling you so; and that ought to have made you understand at once that it was necessary for you to make yourself fine. I did not care, yesterday, for Lady Otterborne is not an idiot; I did not even find out that your bonnet looked shabby; but to day, silly child, you ought to have put on your best."

Janet laughed a little, and coloured a good deal as she replied, pointing to the dowdy little bonnet which lay upon the table, “That is my best bonnet, Mrs. Mathews.”

If Mrs. Mathews was angry now, it certainly was not with Janet. But she called herself by a good many hard names as she recollects not only all the injustice, but all the cruel want of thought which she had manifested.

She could not apologize—that was quite impossible, neither did she think it proper to trust herself to utter aloud all the remorse that was swelling at her heart; so she got up and marched with a hasty but very determined step out of the room, saying, “I will come back presently, Janet. Sit down and read a little, my dear.”

This was all very strange, and the poor girl could not tell what to make of it. But she might have been more puzzled still, perhaps, had she been aware of the violent and unmitigated wrath which the repentant lady was pouring upon her own head the while.

“And so,” thought she, “because I have been all through my life too ugly for anyone to look at me, I am to hold myself fully justified I suppose in forgetting altogether the personal appearance of this lovely girl! How true is it that we none of us know what we are till we are tried! I deserve. But there is no use in wasting my time to think what I deserve; it will be more to the purpose to think what I can do. I must speak to Sally Spicer.”

And then she rang the bell, and, obedient to the summons, Sally came. But Sally was not invited to sit down. It was no gossiping business now that was to be discussed. It was a time for action, and Mrs. Mathews only wanted a little more information in order to set actively to work.

“Have you unpacked all Miss Anderson’s trunks, Sally?” demanded the lady.

“Yes, ma’am,” replied the maid.

And there was something in Sally Spicer’s look and accent, as she said this, that caused Mrs. Mathews to become as red as scarlet. The silence of a moment ensued.

“I suppose you found that she brought very little with her by way of a wardrobe?” said Mrs. Mathews.

“Oh, dear me! ma’am, next to nothing at all,” replied Sally. “There’s proper linen, you know, ma’am, all very neat and tidy; but by way of dresses I should say there was just nothing at all.”

“Exactly so,” replied Mrs. Mathews; “that is what I

expected. Miss Anderson's fortune is all in India, Sally, and in the care of Indian guardians. It is a very handsome fortune, and her guardians chose that, when she came to England, everything should be furnished for her in the nicest manner possible. I have promised to do this, and I certainly will perform my promise as well as I can; but you know as well as I do, Sally, that I am very apt to be careless in such matters, and therefore I expect that you will help me a little. If you see that I forget anything that a young lady of fashion and fortune ought to have, I desire that you will tell me of it. I do assure you, Sally, that with Miss Anderson's fortune she ought to want nothing. But I know I am very forgetful about many things, and fine dresses, I am afraid, are among the number. But you never forget anything, Sally, and therefore I shall depend very much upon you.

And there are two things which, in particular, I wish you to remember; one is, that Miss Anderson has a very handsome fortune, and the other, that nothing will make me so unhappy, and so angry too, as finding out that she wants anything of any kind, because I did not happen to remember it."

Sally listened with great attention, both to the very interesting statement, and the urgent injunctions which accompanied it, and having promised attention, and obedience, she proceeded to make a faithful report of the present state of the young lady's wardrobe, the most notable features of which were, that her three black dresses were all of them very nearly worn out, and that it was easy to see that the others could never be of any use to her again because she had so entirely outgrown them.

"Well, Sally," replied Mrs. Mathews, "that is exactly what I expected, as I told you before. And it would have been very foolish indeed, you know, if the people in India had filled her trunks with more dresses, when it was so certain she would outgrow them likewise. But what are her three boxes filled with, then? Is it all linen?"

"Oh! dear no, ma'am, it is almost all books," replied Sally. Mrs. Mathews thought she should like to see them. Perhaps it occurred to her that it was possible some of the books might formerly have belonged to the young lady's father.

But this was not the moment to meditate upon such a possibility. There was a great deal of business to be done, and poor Mrs. Mathews did not very well know how to set about it. She felt, however, that at the present moment Sally could do nothing to help her; she was, therefore, dismissed, and the lady was left in her secret bower, to meditate alone.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

IT not unfrequently happens, I believe, that the people who are the most capable of giving unbroken attention to a printed page, are the least able to keep the matter-of-fact affairs of life very steadily in view. The emotion and the pleasure which the arrival of Janet had caused Mrs. Mathews, might, indeed, have put all far away possibilities and contingencies out of more worldly-minded heads than hers; and the new and very delightful feeling of tender love for the fatherless girl had so completely absorbed her, that all the peculiar circumstances of her own marriage-settlement had as wholly vanished from her memory as if she had never heard a word on the subject.

It was very natural, however, that the recollection of it should rush back upon her at a moment when the first object of her heart was to prevent anybody and everybody from supposing that John Anderson's daughter was left destitute, and the first result of this recollection was a feeling very like despair. But the mind of Mrs. Mathews was not calculated to retain such a feeling long. "I am but fifty years old," thought she. "In the course of nature I may expect to live twenty years more; and during that time, particularly if I survive my husband, I shall be able to save money; and, lovely as she is, there is little chance of her remaining single."

And then followed a heartfelt thanksgiving for her present independence, which she felt was more precious to her at that moment than any reversionary prospects could possibly be.

But where were her book-buying schemes, and the conversion of the laundry into a library gone to? Vanished for ever and for ever.

But if these had passed away, there were others which had taken their place, and various and brilliant were the plans for the future which were born within the brain of Mrs. Mathews during the next ten minutes. But she indulged herself in this delightful way no longer; she felt that she had much to do, and immediately set about what she considered as the best way of performing the important task that was before her.

She had promised Janet that she would return to her, and she kept her word, though she felt quite as nervous as any

young lady could do when bent upon the performance of some difficult stratagem by which she was to recruit her own fading wardrobe.

She could not endure the idea of Janet's feeling pained and humiliated, by a sense of obligation to her. But how was this to be avoided?

"I would rather she should think me a tyrant, and love me in spite of my tyranny, than that she should be weighed down by a feeling of eternal obligation," thought she.

"She must soon see, however, if she is not a fool, that she can do more for me than I can ever do for her. If she can but love me!—me! an ugly old woman, and the wife of Mr. Mathews! God help her, poor child! I should not think it was very easy."

And as she concluded her soliloquy, she descended the stairs and again presented herself before Janet.

"Well, Janet, I have been talking to Sally about your wardrobe. Sally is my factotum, you must know; and I consult her about everything. She tells me, Janet, that you have outgrown all your frocks, my dear, and, therefore, by your goodwill and pleasure, we must set about buying new ones."

Janet blushed, and smiled, and flattered herself that she had perfectly succeeded in concealing her inclination to weep instead; for it was with quite a cheerful voice that she said—

"I am a very good workwoman, my dear Mrs. Mathews, and you shall see that I will manage to make my frocks quite long enough for me, without your having the trouble of buying more."

Mrs. Mathews knit her brows.

"This will never do, Janet," said she, after reflecting for a moment upon the best mode of proceeding. "Don't make me angry, my dear. My temper, I believe, is not a very good one; and, therefore, you must be careful, you know, not to put me in a passion. And you will put me in a passion, and a terrible passion, too, I promise you, if you ever talk again about altering your frocks, and being a workwoman."

There was something so unreasonable in this; and, moreover, there was so much of anger in the frowns and the accents of Mrs. Mathews that the poor girl felt both puzzled and frightened.

Mrs. Mathews looked at her, and shook her head.

"I believe we are both of us very uncomfortable, Janet," said she; "but if it goes on so, it must be our own faults; for the

truth is, my dear, that we have both of us great reason to be thankful at being together, instead of being uncomfortable."

"I am very thankful for being with you, dearest Mrs. Mathews," said Janet; "and the only reason I have for being uncomfortable is that I cannot help being conscious that I must be a burden to you."

"A burden! That is your notion of the tie between us, is it?" said Mrs. Mathews, looking very much as if she had an inclination to cry herself.

"I wonder," she added, after silently looking in Janet's embarrassed face for a minute or two—"I wonder whether there would be most wisdom or most folly in letting you at once into my secret? Be honest, my dear, and tell me if you think you could listen to a romance about an ugly old woman, without its making you sick?"

Janet returned her earnest look, and then said, "Are you the ugly old woman?"

There was something so loving, and so confiding in the expression of Janet's eyes as she said this, that Mrs. Mathews suddenly threw her arms round her, and pressed her fondly to her heart.

"Yes, I am, my Janet," she replied, "and I have made no blunder in thinking that I may safely commit the moustrosity of telling you that in the days of my youth I fell in love—deeply, faithfully in love—Janet Anderson, and the man I loved was your father."

"I thought so," said Janet, looking comforted, and gently taking the hand of Mrs. Mathews, and kissing it.

"You thought so, Janet? When, and where, did you think so?"

"I can hardly tell you, Mrs. Mathews; I hardly know myself. But the first notion came into my head before papa died. I am very glad you have told me; oh, so very, very glad!"

"And why are you glad, Janet?"

"There, again, is a question that it is very hard to answer," returned Janet, with a smile that certainly made her look much less uncomfortable than she had done a few minutes before. "I do not think that your telling me this gives me any right to feel less—less shocked, I believe I must call it, by all you do for me; but yet it *has* that effect, somehow or other."

"And that is the effect it ought to have, my dearest child," replied Mrs. Mathews; "it is the right and natural effect. From this time forward, Janet, you must be aware, without my again

telling you so, that you are an object of very tender love and interest to me. If I survive my dear father, I may truly tell you that you will be the only being I shall have left to love in the world. I did not marry Mr. Mathews because I loved him, but because my father wished it very earnestly; and till your father's letter announced your coming to me, Janet, I was living without any object that could interest me, except my books. You are an honest girl, dearest, I am sure of it; and I will now ask you to tell me whether you think my having to watch over you, and provide for all your wants, is a pleasure to me, or a pain?"

"A pleasure!" replied Janet, fervently; "and a pleasure it shall be, if my heart and soul can make it so! And do you not think you have done wisely in telling me what you have done? Do you not think that we shall be both the happier for it?"

Mrs. Mathews looked in her eager, earnest face, and, though Janet was not smiling, she again caught a look that "fathered itself" in such a way as to make it very unlikely that the poor girl would ever feel the want of a mother as long as her father's old friend remained alive.

In short, the result of this important interview, though apparently it had begun in doubt and darkness, was to make the old lady and the young one thoroughly understand each other. Mrs. Mathews felt, with a mixture of joy and tenderness, that she could not easily have found words to express, that Janet Anderson would be henceforward to her as a daughter; and Janet, on her side, lost all feeling of painful obligation in the delightful certainty that she was tenderly beloved, and the equally delightful consciousness that she loved her adopted mother so affectionately in return as to make her of some value to this singularly ill-mated friend, notwithstanding the poverty she brought with her.

There was no further difficulty after this as to the manner in which Mrs. Mathews spent her tens and her hundreds, and the consequence was that Janet grew into a particularly well-dressed young lady, considerably to the astonishment of gentle Mrs. Price and her daughter Louisa.

Meanwhile, however, the sociable propensities of Mr. Mathews were effectually checked by the very resolute though unexplained will of his lady; for till she thought her Janet "fit to be looked at," she took very effectual care that she should not be seen.

The interval, however, was not altogether lost by the proud and happy grandfather, for he did not leave the house of a single neighbour unvisited. The weather chanced to be perseveringly fine, and no sooner was the luncheon removed than the horses appeared, and the two extremely well-pleased and well-dressed gentlemen set off at an easy trot, that took them in turn to every gentleman's house in the neighbourhood ; so that before the first grand dinner came off at Weldon Grange, Mr. Stephen Cornington, instead of being a stranger, had been made most advantageously known to everybody that he was likely to meet with there or anywhere else.

His estimable progenitress, Mrs. Martha Briot, had shown great judgment in sending the young man with a sufficient wardrobe to enable him to show himself off, on arriving, to some advantage. It is probable that without this precaution he might have failed, notwithstanding his extraordinary likeness to his grandfather, to produce so favourable an effect upon all beholders as he had now done.

Already had he played (and won) several games at billiards with the aristocratic Sir Charles Otterborne ; already had he been declared by the beautiful heiress, Miss Steyton, to be the handsomest man in Hertfordshire. Already had Mrs. Price ventured to pronounce that he had very decidedly an air of fashion, modestly accompanying this expression of her judgment by assuring her hearers, according to her invariable custom, that she should not venture to give her opinion upon the subject had not her being a Smitherton, and the granddaughter of Lord Thompson, given her a sort of hereditary right to have some judgment in such matters.

In a word, Stephen Cornington had so suddenly and so generally won golden opinions from all sorts of men, and women too, that there was no danger whatever of his wanting the means to appear in fashionable array before them as long as his admiring grandfather had the power of furnishing them.

But there was one visit made in the course of this extensive circuit by Mr. Mathews, which most certainly would have been omitted had he not felt the delightful conviction that his grandson was as accomplished and well-informed as he was elegant and handsome ; and this visit was to Proctor Castle.

It was not very often that Mr. Mathews called there himself, for as the noble family were absent, the visit could only be paid to the Roman Catholic priest, who was librarian and chaplain there ; and in neither of these capacities was it at all likely that

Mr. Cuthbridge should have possessed much interest in the eyes of Mr. Mathews.

But Mr. Cuthbridge had the reputation throughout the whole neighbourhood of being the most learned and the most accomplished man in it, and it was for this reason that he wished to give his very particularly clever grandson the advantage of being known to, and doubtless duly appreciated by, one whose opinion in such matters was law.

Nevertheless, it is likely enough that this visit to Mr. Cuthbridge would have been one of the last paid (which it was not) had not Stephen himself, upon hearing that there was such a person as a Roman Catholic priest residing at a nobleman's castle in the neighbourhood, expressed a very earnest wish to make acquaintance with him.

His grandfather at first, however, only smiled at his eagerness, and said,

" You shall certainly go, my dear boy, because it is particularly right and proper that you should, on account of his being such a remarkably clever man. But you must not expect to find anything so agreeable as Sir Charles. No sporting talk *there*, my dear boy.

" But I should like to go, Sir, nevertheless, as soon as you can make it convenient. I feel so curious to see an English castle."

" I understand, I understand," replied his grandfather—" an inquiring mind, Stephen! That's what it is, my good fellow; and that is exactly what your good grandmother gave me to understand I should find in you. It is not this thing, or that, but just everything that's clever, I take it that you have a taste for."

" Then we shall go to the castle to-morrow, grandfather. Shall we, Sir?"

Delighted by this eagerness, which, like every other manifestation in the young man, never failed to delight his proud progenitor, Mr. Mathews gave the required promise, and kept it.

Stephen was enchanted by the approach to the castle, and declared that he had never yet seen any place which he thought so beautiful.

" I hope I shall see it again, and again!" said he, quite enthusiastically. " It is nothing of a distance for me to walk, and when there is nothing particular to be done, you may depend upon it, Sir, that I shall be strolling over here. But you

must not fancy that I want to steal off, and take up my abode at the castle, even if you hear that I am seen walking this way for everlasting. For, after all, my dear Sir, I shall never see any place that I really like so well as Weldon Grange."

When the youth was presented to the priest, however, he looked more than half afraid of him, and assumed a tone of infinitely greater respect than his grandfather had ever seen him exhibit before.

This manner, however, certainly seemed to propitiate the said priest, for though he assumed nothing like familiarity towards the young man, yet he seemed evidently inclined to take a good deal of notice of him, and when they parted, he said very civilly that he hoped he should see him again.

" You are a clever fellow, Stephen ! " exclaimed the chuckling Mr. Mathews, as soon as they had remounted their horses and passed the castle gates ; " for somehow or other you contrive to make everybody civil to you, stranger as you are amongst them all. I should like to know, now, what it was you said to that solemn old gentleman during the minute or two that you stood talking to him in the bow-window. It was something clever, I'll be bound for it, for I did not think he *was* particularly civil before that. He put on the stiff look which he often favours us all with, except perhaps my wife. I don't think he is ever stiff with her. But every one knows that the reason for *that* is her being so uncommonly clever. Why, he sends her books by dozens out of the castle library."

" Perhaps he is in hopes that he shall convert her, Sir ? " said Stephen Cornington, rather gravely.

" Well ! I don't know about that, I'm sure. But I'll tell you what, Stephen. If he knew her as well as I do, he would never take it into his head that she was to be turned into any way but her own. No, no, boy ; it is nothing but her cleverness and her book-learning, and I daresay he has found out the same sort of thing in you, you sly rogue. My notion of you is, Master Stephen, that you know how to take the length of every man's foot."

Stephen shook his head and pretended to look modest, which only caused Mr. Mathews to laugh heartily. " You may take everybody else in, my fine fellow ; but you will never take in me ! Why ! don't I know what I was myself at your age ? Wasn't I up to everything ? I'll bet ten to one now, that if any one was to ask the priest at this moment, what he thought

of you, he would answer that he thought you the cleverest, and, perhaps, Stephen, he might say, too, the handsomest lad that he had seen for many a day.” But Stephen again only looked modest, and said nothing in reply.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

Not many days were permitted to elapse before Lady Otterborne returned the visit of Mrs. Mathews and her young companion, and on this occasion, and on this only, was Janet allowed to make her appearance in the drawing-room, although the condemned black silk frock was still her only habit of ceremony. But Mrs. Mathews, though often literally and absolutely blind to the richness and elegance of her neighbours’ dresses, had contrived to discover that the toilet of Lady Otterborne was quite as simple, though not quite so uncouth as her own, and she had therefore no more objection to Janet’s thus appearing before her, than she would have had to exhibit a beautiful picture to a connoisseur, even although she had no frame to put it in.

And she was amply rewarded for her courage and her confidence, by the very evident interest which Lady Otterborne took in conversing with this natural, fresh-minded, intelligent, and beautiful new acquaintance. Greatly did Mrs. Mathews enjoy the watching this, and her pleasure perhaps would have been greater still, had her friend Herbert accompanied his mother as he usually did, whenever she made a visit at the Grange.

Had he *not* been an engaged man, Mrs. Mathews would have proudly abstained from all wishes on the subject, but as it was, it would have pleased her to have seen the mother’s rather fastidious judgment in favour of her Janet, confirmed by her still more fastidious son.

Not only, however, did he not accompany his mother upon this occasion, but when, a day or two afterwards, he did call at the Grange, he sauntered about the garden instead of entering the house, while he sent in his card to the lady of the mansion with these words written upon it with a pencil : “*Can I see you by yourself for a few minutes?*”

Mrs. Mathews and Janet were sitting very comfortably, *tête-à-tête*, when this card was delivered to the former; and had the request which required her dismissing her new darling from her presence, been made by any one who was not a darling of longer standing, it would certainly not have been complied with. As it was, however, Mrs. Mathews condescended to say, "Desire Mr. Otterborne to come into my book-room;" and having given this answer, she kissed Janet and sent her off, adding to her words of dismissal, "It is very strange of him, Janet; but he says he must see me alone, and I never, since he was born, refused Herbert Otterborne anything he asked."

Janet decidedly agreed in thinking that it was very strange of him; but she did not seem to think that she could make any resistance to the sentence of banishment thus passed upon her, and she was therefore very quietly lodged in her own pretty room long before Herbert Otterborne had climbed the cork-screw staircase which led to the favourite retreat of his old friend.

The sight of him immediately banished all the anger of Mrs. Mathews, for he looked ill and out of spirits. "You have some bad news to tell me, I am sure, Herbert. I trust that your dear mother is not ill?"

"No! Thank God! my mother is not ill, though ill at ease in mind, as well as her unfortunate son. You say I have bad news for you, Mrs. Mathews. But, no! I bring no news at all. My father, I find, has already announced the news to you. And it is quite true, my dear old friend—it is quite true that I am going to be married to Miss Steyton."

"Most heartily do I wish you may be happy, my dear boy," replied Mrs. Mathews, with a painful and perfectly involuntary contraction of her brow; "but you do not come here to be told *that*, for you know it already, Herbert."

"Yes," he replied, "I am quite sure that if your wishes could make me happy, I should have nothing left to complain of; neither do I intend to complain. But, I cannot marry Emily Steyton without explaining to you, my dear kind old friend, how it came about, for you know, though, thank Heaven! nobody else does, how far I am from loving her. Whether it was most your fault or my fault, I don't know; but certain it is that we have very freely compared notes together concerning her from the first week, I believe, that she returned from school up to the present now. I wish this had not been the case; I heartily wish that no human being knew how very, *very* far she is from

pleasing me in any way. Do not think, however, that I am come here now to ask you for any promise of secrecy on the subject. You are quite as certain to avoid any disclosure of my confidential confessions as I am to wish that you should do so. What I come for is to exculpate myself, in your eyes, from the charge either of caprice or inconsistency. I am not capricious in this matter, because my opinions and my feelings respecting this young lady are precisely what I expressed to you when we last conversed together about her. Nor is there any inconsistency in my conduct. But in order to prove this, I must tell you many painful things. Will you have patience to listen to me?"

"Do not have recourse to any painful explanations, my dear Herbert, in order to preserve my good opinion," said Mrs. Mathews; "I know you too well to believe that you would wilfully do wrong in any way."

"Don't refuse to hear me, Mrs. Mathews!" said the young man earnestly. "It will be a comfort if you will let me open my heart to you; for I do not believe that I am false by nature, and yet I dare not, on this subject, tell the truth, even to my own mother. Will you listen to me?"

"You know I will," said Mrs. Mathews, with an affectionate smile, but with some sadness too, for she felt certain that she was going to hear a tale of sorrow.

"It will be no news to you to hear that my father has mortgaged his estate to the last possible shilling;—that is a fact, I believe, with which everybody is familiar," said he.

Mrs. Mathews did not say "Yes," but she looked it.

"For the last few years," he resumed, "everything has seemed to go on very smoothly, in consequence of the large legacy left to my mother; but now that resource fails."

"You do not mean to say, Herbert, that your father has spent thirty thousand pounds of ready money since that legacy came to him?" said Mrs. Mathews, almost with a look of terror.

"Every shilling of it," replied poor Herbert, covering his eyes with his hand.

"Good Heaven! What madness! What sinful madness!" she exclaimed. "And your mother, Herbert?"

"Ay! there's the grief. My mother has no idea that this money is gone. She believes that he has been squandering the interest; but, excepting his frequent dinner-parties, she has never witnessed any great increase of expenditure at home.

She has a notion, I believe, that he occasionally plays when he is in town ; but little guesses, poor angel, that he has lost everything he could dispose of, and that he is absolutely and completely a ruined man."

"Do not go on, my dear boy ! I see it all now !" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews. " You are going to sacrifice yourself for the sake of your mother ? "

" Certainly I am," he replied ; " and you would do exactly the same thing, Mrs. Mathews, were you in my place. But it is not to tell you this that I come here now. The fact must be too obvious to you for it to be at all necessary that I should point it out. The point upon which I wish to enlighten you is this :— You must not suppose that I have been such a villain as to ask a girl, for whom I do not care a farthing, to give herself and her fortune to me, merely because my father is a ruined man. It is not I who proposed this marriage, it was Mr. Steyton."

" Well, Herbert ! the father has shown himself a wise man. He has made a good choice. I am only afraid that it may have been as much for the sake of the title, which you are to inherit, as for the high character you bear, that he has selected you."

" It is for neither, Mrs. Mathews. The proposal, as he coarsely told me himself, comes from his daughter. His communication to me was in this wise : First, he told me that his daughter would have eighty thousand pounds sterling paid down to her husband on the day of her marriage. Next, that she was as good as she was handsome. Thirdly, that she had assured him, in confidence, that she never would be married to any man but me. Fourthly, that she had never been contradicted in her life. Fifthly, that he was certain that she would die if she were contradicted now. And, sixthly and lastly, if eighty thousand pounds were not considered enough by way of a fortune, he could easily make it double if I made a point of it."

" And to this proposal you said ' Yes,' " said Mrs. Mathews, fixing her eyes upon the floor.

" To this proposal I said ' No,' my good friend, and so I should have thought you would have guessed. I did the thing, however, as civilly as I could,—pretending to laugh very heartily, and to suppose that he was only jesting with me. After trying —of course in vain—to convince me he was in earnest, he left me, and I began to compliment myself upon the manner in which I had got out of the scrape, when my father desired to see me in the billiard-room, which was the safest place he could have chosen, for it was a room that my mother never entered.

He closed the door, however, and pointing to the chair I was to take, placed himself opposite to me. He began by boasting that he had never plagued me about business from the hour I was born to that which then found us together; and then he began to give me a long history of his embarrassments, not one of which had been occasioned, he said, by any ill-conduct of his own, but by a series of misfortunes, and by the most cursed ill-luck that ever persecuted any man. But it is idle for me to repeat all he said, the result is the only thing important. He then—for the first time certainly—made me understand the nature of the dilemma in which he found himself. He has no power, it seems, to mortgage anything that is left of the estate, beyond his own life interest. Of the legacy of thirty thousand pounds left to my mother, he told me that not more than a few hundreds remained; but he told me, moreover, that when these were drawn for and gone, no earthly power could prevent an execution being sent into the house. ‘For myself,’ said he, ‘I give you my honour, Herbert, I do not care sixpence about it. I am used to difficulties—they are nothing to me—they really do not affect me in the least; but I own to you that I shall be sorry to see your mother driven from the house, and all the furniture seized, and sold by auction. Perhaps you will not mind it, Mr. Herbert,’ he added, very jocosely; ‘but I shall find it very disagreeable.’ I was quite certain, long before he had got to this point, that the interview would not end without some mention being made of Miss Steyton’s *attachment* to me; and sure enough the transition was a very easy one, from the disagreeable necessity of seeing my mother without a bed to lie upon, and the having the gratification of telling her that every incumbrance was paid, and that she could not by possibility ever hear of pecuniary difficulties again as long as she lived.

“I will honestly confess to you, my good friend,” continued the agitated young man, “that as long as my father remained with me, I was too vehemently irritated by all the atrocities to which directly, or indirectly, he had pleaded guilty, to feel at all inclined to sacrifice myself for the sake of enabling him to continue his course as a man of fashion about town; and I told him that I did not feel such a degree of attachment to the young lady as could justify my proposing to her. He received my refusal with the stoicism of a man who has hardened himself too completely to feel anything very strongly. Before he left me, however, he made me promise that I would not

have the barbarity as he called it, of opening my mother's eyes to the real state of his affairs. 'I shall, doubtless, have to fly the country before long,' said he, 'and this will be a better mode by which to make her understand the real state of the case, than a helpless and hopeless statement of accounts. You must therefore pledge me your word that you will not betray to her what I have now told you.' This promise I very readily gave, for I perfectly agreed with him in thinking that no good could arise from announcing what was inevitable, before the period arrived at which it must of necessity be met and endured. And so we parted. Whether he had sufficient knowledge of me, and of my profound attachment to my matchless mother, to anticipate what followed, I know not, but certain it is that I had not long brooded in solitude upon the fate which awaited her, before my resolution began to relax, and then, as we all do, I suppose, when tempted by some strong motive to do what we know to be rather doubtful in its righteousness, I began to accuse myself of being over scrupulous. And then I proceeded to doubt the sanity of the judgment which could conceive that the plunging such a mother as mine into all the miseries of pecuniary embarrassment, and that for the whole of her remaining life, was a more virtuous act than the accepting the hand of a beautiful and generous young girl, whose greatest fault seemed to be that she loved me too well. I had not very long contemplated the subject in this light before I began to tremble at my own selfishness, and to feel that what had at first appeared to me as a crime, chiefly because it was disagreeable to me, was in fact the only line of conduct for me to pursue if I really wished to act rather in conformity to duty than inclination. The rest, my dear Mrs. Mathews, is soon guessed, and soon told. I am happy to say that I did not hesitate long as to the course I intended to pursue after I had once made up my mind as to what, according to my judgment, had the most of right and the least of wrong in it. I deemed it to be discreetest and best to avoid all preliminary discussion with my mother concerning the alliance I was about to form. In truth, I feared that she might cross-examine me a little more closely than I wished, and therefore I never touched upon the subject at all till matters were so far advanced as to enable me to tell her that I had offered to Emily Steyton and had been accepted. I can scarcely tell which was the most painful moment—whether it was that in which I learned, upon the very best authority, that my father was utterly ruined, or that

in which I had to meet the earnest melancholy look of my mother, at the moment in which I announced to her my engagement. Alas ! I understood that look so very well. I daresay, dear soul ! that she thought herself very forbearing because she uttered no exclamation indicative either of sorrow or dismay ; but her look spoke both too intelligibly for me to profit much by her forbearance. But, thank Heaven ! all that is over, everything is settled and arranged in the most pompous style possible. My father has had the discretion to say nothing to me concerning my sudden change of purpose, and my poor mother has only once or twice endeavoured to make me say something in explanation of the feelings which have induced me to select for my wife a young lady whom she certainly had reason to think I did not admire much more than she did herself."

" And how have you replied to her, my poor Herbert ? " said Mrs. Mathews.

" As for that," replied the young man, with a melancholy smile, " I think I have managed very cleverly. Sometimes I have said, ' Mother, she is very beautiful,' with an accent which was intended to convince her that I considered this as a sufficient excuse for forgetting and forgiving all other deficiencies ; and occasionally I have hinted in a very sentimental tone at her devoted attachment to me. And nothing more confidential has passed between us. In truth, I carefully avoid all *tête-à-tête* conversations with my mother just at present, nor will she, as I hope, ever know how completely I have sold myself for the price Mr. Steyton so liberally offered. The worst misfortune, I hope, that she will have to bear, is the being obliged to confess to her heart that her son is not quite so high-minded as she has been used to think him, and that, like all other very silly young men, he has been caught by a beautiful face, and the flattering belief that the fair creature to whom it belongs is devotedly attached to him."

" But in your own case, dear Herbert, this, at least, is no flattering delusion. Were she a penniless beauty seeking to entrap you, it might be so ; but, as it is, I think it impossible to doubt the sincerity of her attachment."

The young man made no reply, not even by a look, and having thanked his greatly-valued old friend for the patient hearing she had afforded him, and expressed his hope that she agreed with him in thinking that his conduct was at least excusable, he took his leave, but not before he had received her

promise to assist him to the best of her power in persuading his mother to believe that the marriage he was about to make was one of inclination on his part, and not of interest.

Mrs. Mathews would have given a more unreasonable promise than this, if by so doing she could in any way have soothed or comforted him ; for all his efforts to conceal from her his own strong repugnance to the match had been in vain.

Mrs. Mathews had known him and loved him from a child, and his countenance was not one that such a friend could misunderstand. Whether he was wrong or right in what he had done she hardly knew, but not to love him more than ever for his devotion to his ill-matched mother was impossible.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Poor Herbert's story had taken such strong possession of her mind, that Mrs. Mathews felt irresistibly impelled to communicate it to Janet.

She was too conscientious, however, to yield to this impulse without carefully asking herself if it were possible that she could do any mischief by doing so ; but she speedily convinced her conscience that she could not. Moreover, it certainly did occur to her as possible that Janet herself might be of use, if she knew exactly how matters stood ; for Lady Otterborne had said, during the long morning visit she had made at the Grange, that she should always be very glad to see her at the Manor-house.

"There are but a few fields, Miss Anderson," she had said, "between the Grange garden and the steps which lead into our deer-park ; if you have courage to climb them, you would find that we are divided by a very short walk. It will be a charity, Mrs. Mathews, if you will kindly spare her to me sometimes."

There was much in this invitation most particularly agreeable to the feelings of Mrs. Mathews ; for, in the first place, it was a flattering offering to the memory of Janet's father, who had been more intimately known to Lady Otterborne, perhaps, than to any one in the neighbourhood besides herself. And it might have

been for this reason that Mrs. Mathews, when introducing Janet, had only named her, without referring to her father at all ; for when she found that the name awakened no recollection of this intimacy, she determined to leave the possibility of future recognition to chance, not feeling at all disposed to refer sentimentally to the days that were gone, to one who might perhaps remember a good deal about them herself.

But no sooner was Lady Otterborne left alone than, while thinking of the very pretty creature she had just seen, she recollects that she bore the name of her old acquaintance, and the prompt return of Janet's visit, was chiefly for the purpose of ascertaining if she were indeed his daughter.

The very cordial kindness of manner that followed her discovering that her conjecture was correct was in every way agreeable, both to the poor girl herself, and her protectress ; for the being treated by Lady Otterborne as an old acquaintance was quite sufficient to ensure her a pleasant reception throughout the whole neighbourhood.

And, besides this, it was now evident that the graceful lady of the Manor-house was greatly inclined to cultivate the acquaintance of Janet for her own sake ; for Lady Otterborne was not a person likely to remind a young lady that she was within easy walking distance of her, unless she saw good reason to believe that she should like her companionship.

In short, Mrs. Mathews was greatly delighted by the compliment thus offered to her adopted daughter, and certainly felt also that this compliment might be more safely accepted now than it could have been if the young heir of Otterborne were still a disengaged man.

It is true, indeed, that she thought she never had seen two young people more perfectly well-suited to fall in love with each other than Janet Anderson and Herbert Otterborne ; but, notwithstanding this pleasant persuasion, she was fully aware of the fact, that it would be difficult to find any two young people whose falling in love with each other would be more inconvenient.

But Janet now knew everything concerning the engagement and the motive for it ; and her adopted mother did her but justice, in believing that she would rather have set off alone on a voyage back to India than have made herself attractive in any way to the hero of the tale she had listened to with such deep interest.

Meanwhile the process which was to transmute Janet from a

very shabbily-dressed little girl into an elegant and fashionable-looking young lady, was going on so rapidly and successfully, that Mrs. Mathews announced her intention of sending out dinner invitations to the neighbours in their immediate vicinity. This news was exceedingly welcome both to Mr. Mathews and his grandson; nor was Janet at all inclined to be an uninterested spectator on the occasion; for the beautiful Emily Steyton was to be of the party, and she felt strangely anxious to see what sort of a person it could be, who, being declared on all sides to be equally lovely and attached, was still to be accepted as a painful appendage to her own magnificent fortune.

Janet felt as if there was something harsh and unjust in the judgment thus pronounced against her. She suspected that pride of birth was the besetting sin both of the noble-looking Herbert Otterborne and his mother; and heartily pitied the young and beautiful girl, who, though she had a right to say,—

“I give thee all, I can no more,”

without any qualifying confession as to the poverty of the offering, seemed, nevertheless, to be accepted as a hard and heart-breaking necessity.

The dinner-parlour at Weldon Grange was a very handsome room, and its table could accommodate sixteen guests, which was precisely the number collected round it on this particularly magnificent occasion. The Manor-house sent three, the Parsonage four, the Lodge three, and the Proctor Castle one; which, together with the family party at the Grange, amounted if my arithmetic does not deceive me, exactly to that number.

The party ought to have been a very pleasant one; for, with the exception of good Mr. King himself, there was not one who did not feel a much greater degree of interest in it than is usually excited by a country dinner-party where the guests are all near neighbours, and for the most part well known to each other.

One great source of this interest, and the one most generally felt, was the appearance in society of Mr. Otterborne and Miss Steyton as affianced lovers, for the first time.

There was also a considerable degree of curiosity excited by the known fact that there was a superbly handsome young man and a very pretty girl, added to the family party at the Grange since the neighbours had last met there.

Sir Charles felt as light-hearted as a prisoner just released from durance vile, and as vain as a peacock of displaying him-

self once more as the first man in the society, without even a shadow of fear that he might be arrested before he left the house, or that he might find an execution in full action when he returned to his own.

Mr. Mathews seemed to feel that he had grown taller since the land he stood upon might be considered as his own, while his bearing and carriage were even more graceful than heretofore, as he presented Stephen to all comers as his grandson.

Neither was the learned Mrs. Mathews without her share of pomps and vanities on this occasion, and it is but fair to confess that she was quite as proud of John Anderson's descendant as her husband was of his own.

By far the most striking figure of the whole party, however, was the bride elect. The pretty delicate-looking Louisa Price seemed to fade before her into the likeness of a flaxen-haired doll; and even the exquisitely-chiselled features, the dark thoughtful eye, and light graceful form of Janet, were as completely overpowered as a star before the brightness of the mid-day sun.

Emily Steyton was tall and her form was already magnificently developed; the bust was very full, and her fine throat and arms were as smooth and almost as white as marble.

It would be no easy matter to describe her face justly, for the features taken separately were not perfect; yet the extraordinary brightness of her eyes, the dazzling brilliancy of her complexion, the deep carnation of her lips, and the ivory whiteness of her faultless teeth, produced altogether an effect so radiantly beautiful that no voice would have been listened to with patience which should have attempted to point out a fault in it. And to complete the whole, her rich dark auburn hair might have furnished an invaluable study to any artist engaged in painting Mary Magdalene. In short the face and figure of Emily Steyton were such as must have elicited a murmur of applause from any assemblage of people upon earth, provided only that they were not blind.

The judgment likely to be passed upon the style of her dress would have been less uniform. Many, a large majority, perhaps, would have been ready to declare that it was exactly everything that it ought to be, and it is not improbable that some might have been found whose opinion would have been precisely the reverse.

If the exhibiting her extraordinary beauty to the greatest advantage was her object, it would, however, have been nearly

impossible for any one to deny that she had attained it. Her neck and arms were displayed certainly with very lavish freedom ; yet there was always ready a delicate drapery of the very finest Brussels lace, bearing in form the mimicry of a little mantle, with a floating ribbon, and a pendant tassel here and there, of that soft apricot tint which contrasts, yet blends, so favourably with a cream-tinctured skin ; and this mantle was wrapped closely round, or else permitted to fall forgotten away from her, in the most fascinating style imaginable.

Young as she was she was already pretty well accustomed to be stared at ; and it was for this reason, perhaps, that she now met the magnificent eyes of Stephen Cornington, notwithstanding the fixed audacity of the glance, with no embarrassment, and only a little toss of the head, that had more of playfulness than of anger in it.

Even Mrs. Mathews herself, far enough as she was from being very partial to her beautiful neighbour, could not withdraw her eyes from her without an effort ; but before long she had inwardly taken herself to task, by the mental declaration that she was an ass to keep staring at that odious girl, when she might look at her own delicate and dainty Janet instead. But not all her heart-deep partiality to the said Janet could prevent her feeling, when she did look at her, that, in point of brilliant effect, there was no more comparison between them, than between the soft pale light of the moon, and the blazing splendour of the sun.

The only comfort she could find under this affliction was the perceiving that both Janet's feet would be lost in one of Miss Emily's shoes, and that the little finger of Miss Emily's glove would have been a world too wide for Janet's index.

The well known wealth of the Steyton family caused them pretty generally to be considered as people of importance, although Mr. Steyton's ancestors had not ranked among the aristocracy of the land. Mr. Mathews, in particular, did not scruple to confess that as long as people had money, and understood how to spend it like gentlemen,—that is to say for the gratification of their own vanity and their neighbours' palates, he did not see how it could signify anything to anybody where they got it, always presuming that it was not stolen.

Such being the nature of his feelings towards the magnates of the Lodge on ordinary occasions, it may well be supposed that at the present very interesting moment, when all the dignities attached to the Manor-house were about to be blended

with all the bullion of the Lodge, the importance of the whole Steyton family, and its beautiful heiress in particular, made itself felt more strongly than ever.

The first and most natural effect of this was, of course, that Mr. Mathews should present his grandson in the most distinguished manner possible, to every member of the Steyton family, a ceremony under which the Barbadoes young gentleman acquitted himself admirably.

To the father he bowed very solemnly, and very low; to the mother, with a bright and beautiful smile which might have propitiated any middle-aged gentlewoman a little less hard to please than Mrs. Mathews; but to the daughter he could be scarcely said to bow at all; he looked at her, however, with his impudently-eloquent eyes, in a manner which left no doubt as to the intensity of his admiration. Nay it was not admiration only that his look and manner expressed; every nerve, every sense, seemed under the influence of fascination; and with such a face as his, it was so easy to express all that he wished, but all that he dared not have spoken!

Miss Emily Steyton was not perhaps what might generally be considered as a highly intellectual girl, but she was far from being unintelligent. Her own eyes seemed to kindle as obviously from the fire emitted by his, as a phosphoric match does from friction.

Miss Emily, however, was much too violently in love with Herbert Otterborne for this sort of inflammatory effect from the eyes of another to be lasting. But when she quietly returned to her own room that night, she was too honest not to confess to herself that just for a moment that strange boy's magnificent eyes did make her feel very queer.

And she might, and did, very naturally suppose that the strange boy also felt very queer himself. But this was no fault of hers, she could not help it. She should certainly be sorry if anything bad came of it. He was a great deal too handsome to be miserable. But really and truly, she could not help it,—everybody knew she was engaged, etc., etc., etc.

But all this is an episode.

The arrival of Mr. Cuthbridge, the Roman Catholic librarian of Proctor Castle, was the signal for ringing the bell, and announcing that the party were all assembled, and ready for dinner. But even in the best-regulated families there must be a short interval before this important signal can produce its ultimate effect by causing the assembled party to march two-

and-two from drawing to dining-room'; and during this interval, the eyes of the devoted grandfather were riveted with delight upon his fortunate heir, and upon all the little incidents by which the effect he produced upon the company were made manifest.

It certainly, however, was not entirely the conceit of the vain old man which led him to believe that his newly-found Stephen Cornington was not admired by himself alone, nor were the expressive eyes of the beautiful Emily the only ones which bore evident testimony of admiration. Sir Charles Otterborne set his arms a-kimbo, and, assuming the attitude of the Colossus of Rhodes, looked at him from head to foot with the air of a connoisseur contemplating a very fine specimen, and the flattering result was a cordial hand-shaking, and the words, "Don't forget your way to the Manor-house, Mr. Stephen, over the park-palings, you know. We must have another game at billiards together."

The reverend Mr. Price looked at him with a gentle, but rather a doubting eye. Perhaps he thought that he was too handsome for any feelings, decidedly ecclesiastical, to have much hold upon him as yet.

Mrs. Price was decidedly of opinion that he bore a strong resemblance to the Smitherton family, and even whispered to her daughter that there was a good deal of the Thompson look, too, in his eyes. Miss Louisa, herself, only peeped at him furtively now and then, but said nothing about him to anybody.

Mr. Steyton, perhaps, paid him the greatest compliment of all, for he knit his brows when he looked at him; and at one moment when he happened to perceive the eyes of Miss Emily evidently employing themselves in drawing a comparison between her betrothed lover and her new acquaintance, he adroitly changed his own position so as effectually to intercept her view of the dazzling stranger.

Lady Otterborne, however, did not look at him at all, and young Mr. Price very little; but no sooner had the Catholic priest entered the room than the watchful grandfather had the satisfaction of perceiving that his quick eye immediately recognized the young man. He perceived, too, and also with great satisfaction, that the young man not only recognized the learned Catholic priest, but that he immediately broke off the conversation he had contrived to begin with Miss Steyton, at the back of whose chair he had contrived, by one bold move-

ment, to place himself, and approached with an air of great respect to pay his compliments to him.

"What a sharp-witted fellow it is!" thought the delighted grandfather. "He has already found out, somehow or other, that the moment the old castle book-worm is seen to notice a stranger, every soul in the country immediately sets that stranger down as something out of the common way in the article of cleverness."

Moreover the Catholic priest received the young man's respectful salutation by offering him his hand, a courtesy which the haughty-looking ecclesiastic had not bestowed on any gentleman present, except the venerable Mr. King.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was a little awkwardness in the manner in which the sixteen individuals who have been enumerated were marshalled in passing from the drawing-room, and in which they took their places at the dinner-table; but it was almost inevitable, because there were but seven ladies, whereas there were nine gentlemen.

The order of their going was, of course, obvious enough up to a certain point, male heads of houses pairing off with female heads of houses. Mr. Price, indeed, ought to have taken precedence of Mr. Steyton, but then he must have led out his own wife; and Mr. William Price ought to have taken precedence of Stephen Cornington, but then he must have led out his own sister. It might, however, have been more civil, perhaps, if young Mr. Price had been appointed the companion of Janet, which would have left the two reverend gentlemen together, instead of letting the procession be closed by the father and son.

That it was so was the fault of Mrs. Mathews. It was not her pleasure that Janet should be doomed to listen to the simpering insanities of young Mr. Price, and it was her pleasure that she should improve her acquaintance with Mr. Cuthbridge.

And Janet had cause to be grateful to her for it; for, of all the words spoken before the company were marched back again

to the drawing-room, the only portion worth listening to was that which passed between them.

Lady Otterborne sat for the most part in gentle silence beside her venerable host, who had never been a great talker, and was now become a deaf and very silent old man.

It might have been more conducive to her comfort, perhaps, had she not been so placed as to command a full view of her affianced son and his intended bride. Never had she before thought her so lovely, yet never had she disliked her so much. The extreme indelicacy of her dress was so painfully obvious as to make the looking at her earnestly almost an act of indecency, and it was only because she was too directly before her eyes to permit her being unseen, that she ever looked at her at all. Neither was the manner of Miss Emily at all more likely to propitiate Lady Otterborne than her appearance. Sometimes she permitted her beautiful head to approach so nearly to the shoulder of Herbert as very forcibly to suggest the idea that she wished to deposit it there. At other moments she withdrew herself to the farthest possible point from him and turning herself completely at right angles with the table, made it perfectly evident that she had taken the position in order to indulge herself with the pleasure of gazing on his face.

All she said to him was uttered in a whisper, and when he answered without practising the same discretion, she invariably looked reproachfully in his eyes, held up her finger reprovingly, and audibly pronounced the word "Hush!" Perhaps there was no great consolation for her unfortunate ladyship in turning her eyes upon another pair, also on the opposite side of the table, and marking the strong contrast which the manner of their conversing formed to that of her son and his affianced bride.

Mr. Cuthbridge and Janet had very speedily got into what has been expressively called a "full flow of talk." The priest was about sixty years old, and had never, at any period of his existence, been other than a gentleman-like, tranquil-mannered person ; no one had ever seen him

"Wink as an abbot ought not to wink,"

or in any other way offend against ecclesiastical dignity ; but, nevertheless, Mr. Cuthbridge was very far from being a dull man. What were the subjects upon which he contrived to set

Janet talking I know not, but it was something that evidently awakened all her intelligence, and gave to her fair face exactly that degree of animation which announces both intellect and vivacity, yet without disturbing the harmony of the features for an instant.

“Is it possible that Herbert—*my* Herbert, can prefer that gaudy peony to this fair lily?” was the question Lady Otterborne asked herself; and the answer which she felt it her bounden duty to give was terrible in every way, for what could it be save, “*I hope so*”?

Mrs. Mathews was at the top of the table, and Lady Otterborne near the bottom of it, so the point of view was different. Mrs. Mathews could not so distinctly see the bewitching manoeuvrings of Miss Emily, but she could see that her old friend, the Catholic priest, was exactly as much occupied by Janet as she wished him to be. And she, too, found time to hold commune a little with herself, but in a much more agreeable manner than poor Lady Otterborne could do; for Mrs. Mathews could very safely assure herself that the conversation she was watching from a distance, would not betray the appearance of interest which it would, if Janet were only a very pretty girl. “My ‘auld-lang-syne’ partialities have not deceived me,” thought she, with extreme satisfaction. “There is only one thing which could make him listen to her as he does,—and that is, that what she is saying is worth hearing.”

As to the rest of the party, their conversation was so precisely in the ordinary style of such neighbourly meetings, that it is unnecessary to record it. The gentlemen were left to themselves without any indiscreet lingering on the part of the ladies; and the claret (which was the especial care of Mr. Mathews), having more to do in the agreeable half-hour which they passed together than any other element of the party, we will leave them to enjoy it, and pass into the drawing-room with the ladies.

The four married ladies, and the three single ones, were immediately divided into two separate groups, and the usual themes of “country neighbours’” conversation were immediately started and very patiently sustained by the four elders.

The extremely pretty group which the three young girls formed, as they first stood and then sat before a window watching the glories of the setting sun, was enlivened by the following conversation.

Miss Steyton threw her arm, as she stood, round the waist of Louisa Price. "Well, darling," said she; "you know I told you long ago, that I was quite certain what it would come to. He is a magnificent fellow! isn't he, Louy?"

"Not half so magnificent as you are, my dear," replied the fair-haired Louisa, coaxingly. "But he *is* very handsome, certainly," she added; "I am sure I do not mean to deny that; and you will make a lovely couple!" she again added, in a half-whisper.

"You need not whisper, Louisa," said Miss Steyton, laughing; "I do not pretend to make any secret of it; and I should be a fool if I did, in every way; for I will just ask you to guess what chance there would be of preventing any single being in the whole county from knowing that I am going to be married as well as I do myself."

"No; that is very true, to be sure," returned the docile Louisa. "Everything you do, my dear, is talked of as much as if you were the Queen, I think; and no wonder,—is it, Miss Anderson?"

It was not very easy to answer this appeal, for Janet knew nothing whatever concerning the celebrity which the beautiful Emily enjoyed; but she felt that to avow this, would be to avow herself most deplorably unknown, so she smiled, and bowed with an air that expressed nothing like doubt of the statement.

"You must not believe one single word that Louisa Price says of me, Miss Anderson," said the beauty; "for if you do, you may be apt to think I am an angel, for she is positively infatuated in the most ridiculous way in the world. Don't you think she must be a fool, Miss Anderson?"

"Do you really think I am likely to pass such a judgment?" said Janet, with a smile.

"How should I know, my dear?" returned the beauty, laying a large ungloved milk-white hand on each of Janet's shoulders. For anything I know, I may turn your head just in the same absurd manner that I have turned hers. Heaven knows what it is I have got about me that makes people make such a fuss. That beastly old priest, that you sat by at dinner, is the only person, man, woman, or child, that hasn't made a fuss with me since I came home from school. The old brute always looks as if he didn't see me. Idiot!"

"But you forget, my darling Emily, that Mr. Cuthbridge is a Roman Catholic priest. He is bound by his religion, you

know, never to take any notice of ladies," said Miss Price, demurely.

"Stuff and nonsense, Lou. I don't want him to ask me to marry him, I know he can't do that, child," replied Miss Steyton, tossing her beautiful head; "but if he was not a fool, he might look at one. That could not do any harm, I suppose?"

"I am sure I should think that the looking at you could never do anything but good to anybody. But perhaps he has heard how lively you are, dearest, and he may be really *afraid* to listen to you?"

"That's capital!" cried Emily, clapping her hands. "And now you have put it into my head, Lou, you shall see if I don't pay him off. Won't it be first-rate, delicious, girls, if I can make that fusty, musty old priest take fright, and run out of the room?"

"Was there ever such a rattle as she is?" said Louisa, hanging her head on one side, and simpering in the face of Janet.

"Miss Steyton is indeed very lively," replied Janet.

"Miss Steyton! Oh! that's horrible! I can't bear to hear girls call one another *Miss*. It sounds exactly like the teacher at school. What is your Christian name, I wonder?"

"My name is Janet," was the blushing reply.

"What do you colour up so for?" cried the beauty, pointing at her face. "Just look at Janet's face, only because I asked her what her name was! Do you blush in that way, my dear, when gentlemen talk to you? If you do, take my word for it, they will all think you are in love with them. I happen to know that, because I have been told all about it. But I say, Janet, I want to ask you a question," she added, in a whisper really low enough to prevent the married ladies from hearing her. "I say, I want you to tell me something. You are staying in the house, you know, with that beautiful fellow that sat opposite to me at dinner-time. What is his name? Stephen, isn't it? Stephen what?"

"Cornington," replied Janet, succinctly.

"Cornington? That's all. You don't seem inclined to waste words about him. You are not jealous, my dear, are you?"

"I hope not," replied Janet, laughing.

"That is all very well," returned the beauty, gravely nodding her head. "And I hope not, too, my dear,—for, living in the same house with him, you would make pretty work of it. And if you are not jealous, I am sure you are not in love; and that

is another good thing. I say, Janet, did you see how he was staring at me? You sat opposite, you know—I think you must have seen it. What eyes he has, hasn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Cornington has very fine eyes," replied Janet, quietly.

Miss Steyton winked at her friend Louisa, and said, "How grave we are!"

Louisa tried to look intelligent, and nodded in return.

"Yes, I suspect so," said Emily,—bringing her own face very close to that of Janet, as if to examine her very minutely. "It is a fact, Lou! As sure as you live, those eyes of Stephen Cornington's have been searching poor Janet's heart to the very centre! Upon my honour and life, it is a shame! Now listen to me, Janet! You are rather a pretty girl, though you are so thin, and so pale,—and I have a liking for all pretty girls, because you know, I happen to be one myself; and my notion is, that we all ought to make common cause together, and never see a fellow trying to make a fool of a girl, without telling her of it, and putting her on her guard. Now you may trust me, because I am engaged, and can't have any bad motive for what I say; and remember I tell you now, once for all, that your handsome friend, whose fine eyes you admire so much, my gentle Janet, is over head and ears in love with me! Poor dear girl! I am sorry for you, but I can't help it. Can I, Louisa?"

"No, certainly, dearest! It is no fault of yours; and we ought all of us to be on our guard, Miss Anderson, for the same sort of thing may happen again and again."

"What sort of thing do you mean?" inquired Janet, very innocently.

The two other young ladies looked at each other, and laughed.

"Don't you really understand what I meant? Or do you only pretend ignorance?" said Miss Steyton, looking at her with a keen, though laughing glance.

"No, indeed," replied Janet, gravely; "I am not pretending anything."

"Never mind! It's no matter," cried Emily. "Perhaps it is all very fair to pretend a little on first acquaintance; but when you get to be as intimate with me as Louisa Price is, you will find out that it is quite nonsense to pretend anything with me, for I find out everything. Don't I, Louisa?"

"Yes, indeed you do! There never was such a girl born as

you are ! You will understand her better by-and-by, Miss Anderson. But one comfort is, that she is as good as she is clever. She is not contented with looking like an angel, but she really is one,"—was Miss Price's answer ; and after a moment she added, "But I want you to tell me, dearest, when it is to be ?"

"It ? What does *it* mean, I wonder ?" returned the beautiful Emily, crossing her white arms upon her bosom, and raising her bright eyes towards the sky.

"As if I could be talking or thinking of any possible event but ONE !" returned her friend. "Do not be so tantalizing, Emily ! Is the day fixed for your marriage ? Can you understand me now ?"

"Why yes, my dear, I think I understand you," replied Miss Steyton. "You want to know, I suspect, exactly the day, hour, and minute, when your services will be required as bridesmaid ? Do not be afraid love, you shall have quite notice enough to enable you to have your dress made."

"Oh ! you delightful creature !" returned Louisa ; "then you do mean to be married at poor dear Weldon ? Oh ! I am so delighted !"

"Yes, indeed, I certainly intend to be married here. What fun would there be in going to London for it ? I might walk into a London church, to be sure, as expensively dressed as it is possible to be, and there might be as many, or more people to see me there, than there would be here—though I don't quite think that, either ; but what good would there be in that, even if it was so ? The very most that would come of it would be that the people might say, they had seen the most beautiful bride that ever was married, and that her dress was as beautiful as herself. But what good would that do me ? What pleasure would there be in it ? Not one of 'em all would really know anything about me, Lou ! But here, you know, in dear old Weldon, every living soul, from Thomas Barnes the old grey-headed miller, down to little Reddy White, the carrier's grandson, there would not be one single living soul that didn't know me. And then I should have to walk over flowers every step of the way from the carriage to the church-door, and every flower that was gathered for this, by every child in the parish, would be gathered for my sake ; and the little creatures would all say, 'This is for our beautiful Miss Emily !' Oh ! there will be some fun in that, and there would be none at all in London."

This long speech was very rapidly uttered ; but though it

did not take long in the delivery, it gave the thoughtful Janet time to speculate a little upon her beautiful new acquaintance. She had listened to a dismal lament on the part of Mrs. Mathews on the subject of Herbert Otterborne's intended marriage with Emily Steyton. Mrs. Mathews had assured her (and actually with tears in her eyes) that the girl was not only vulgar, ignorant, indelicate, and vain ; but that she had not a single redeeming quality upon which to hang any reasonable hope of improvement. It now struck Janet, as she listened to her, that it was possible Mrs. Mathews might be mistaken. "I have a notion that she is truthful," thought Janet ; " and if my dear father's doctrine be correct, there may be some goodness in her ; for it was one of his favourite theories, that truth was the highest quality with which a human mind can be endowed. I must talk to my new mother about this. Perhaps she may find hope and comfort in it."

While these thoughts were passing in the mind of Janet, her beautiful, dark, quiet, thoughtful eyes were fixed upon the greatly animated face of Miss Steyton ; who, after running on a little longer in the same strain, perceived it, and suddenly stopping short in the description which she was giving, with childish glee, of the beautiful marrying fête which her papa meant to give on the occasion, she took Janet's two hands in hers, and said, with a very bright, good-humoured smile, "I say, Miss Janet, I wish you would be one of my bridesmaids too. I should like to have all the pretty girls in the county for bridesmaids. I hate ugly girls, though I know that the teachers used to say at our school, that all pretty girls hate one another ; but if there is any truth in that, I am sure it is only when they are not quite so sure of being beautiful, as really beautiful people must always be. Will you be my bridesmaid ? I really think, though you are such a tiny thing, compared to me, that you are very pretty and nice-looking. You will, won't you, now ?"

" You are very kind to wish it, my dear Miss Steyton," replied Janet, colouring ; " but I do not feel myself quite my own mistress as yet ; and it is dear Mrs. Mathews who must decide for me."

" Oh ! very well," was the rejoinder. " I don't think I am much of a favourite with dear Mrs. Mathews," and as she spoke, she suffered the hands of Janet to recover their liberty, and turning a little away from her, bestowed a very intelligent wink upon Miss Price.

Janet did not see the wink, but she felt that her hands were thrown away, as it were, with what seemed like a feeling of disappointment, and she reproached herself for having given what might appear an ungracious reception to a proposal which was certainly intended to be complimentary.

But there was no avoiding this, for Janet felt very strongly persuaded that there were very few things which she might not do with greater impunity than undertake the office of bridesmaid at the marriage of Herbert Otterborne and Miss Steyton.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

AND now the scene was again changed by the entrance of the gentlemen from the dining-room. The first words uttered by either of them were in the loud decisive voice of Sir Charles Otterborne.

"How are we to make our rubber, Mathews?" said he.

"If you will take your coffee, Sir Charles (and don't forget the *chasse*, I'll answer for its quality), if you will kindly take your coffee, I'll take care to have a table ready for you directly," replied Mr. Mathews.

"But remember, Mathews," rejoined the absolute Baronet, "remember you are not to give us the old man. Ten to one he'll revoke, and won't hear when he's told of it."

"Who would you like, Sir Charles?" whispered the obsequious host, adding suggestively, "shall I ask Mr. Price?"

"Damn it, no! I would as soon play with an owl, and should like it better; for the owl would not say a word either about orthodoxy or low church. No! let's have the priest, yourself, and Mrs. Steyton. She plays like an idiot; but one can always get a bet out of her."

Having received these orders, the observant Mr. Mathews took immediate measures to comply with the wishes of the greatest man in the party; and whenever a master of the ceremonies is really in earnest, he generally succeeds in obtaining obedience. Mrs. Steyton signified her compliance by a smirk and a bow, that set all her ringlets and earrings dancing; but

when Mr. Mathews approached Mr. Cuthbert, he would have been very glad if the instructions he had received had been less precise ; he would at that moment very greatly have preferred the Protestant to the Catholic priest for his playfellow—for Mr. Cuthbert was actually engaged in what looked very like earnest conversation with Stephen Cornington, and it really was not without a pang that the proud grandfather interfered to put a stop to it.

But no choice was left him—for Sir Charles was not a man whose will could be thwarted in a Weldon drawing-room with impunity ; and, moreover, it was evident that Mr. Cuthbert himself intended to play whist as decidedly as Sir Charles intended it for him, for no sooner did he perceive Mr. Mathews approaching with a pack of cards in his hand, than he turned from the young man to his grandfather ; but while extending his hand to draw a card from the pack that was presented to him, he said, in a voice but little above a whisper, “To-morrow morning, Mr. Cornington.” These words were received by Stephen with a most reverential bow, which was acknowledged on the part of the priest by the slightest possible inclination of the head.

Was it an appointment ? The idea was delightful. Such a compliment had been rarely, if ever, paid by Mr. Cuthbert to any young man in the neighbourhood. Herbert Otterborne, indeed, was occasionally known to have borrowed books from him, the consequence of which was, that he was universally considered throughout the county as the most learned young man in it ; but even he could by no means be considered as being on intimate terms with the erudite librarian. An appointment for the morrow, given, too, with an air of so much mutual understanding, was a compliment indeed !

Stephen fell back with another very deferential bow to make way for the priest and Mr. Mathews on their progress to the card-table ; and till the party were seated at it he continued to stand in an attitude of great respect, and as if he were not conscious that there was any other person in the room save the priest who had so condescendingly spoken to him.

But no sooner were the whist-party fairly settled at their game than the spell seemed taken off him. Perhaps Stephen, young as he was, occasionally played whist himself, and knew that it was an absorbing occupation ; but be this as it may, the solemn expression of his handsome face immediately relaxed, and in the next moment he had seated himself with great

audacity on a footstool exactly in the centre of the group into which the three young ladies had formed themselves in front of a window, the shutters of which were not yet closed.

"Well done, Mr Stephen Cornington!" exclaimed Miss Steyton, laughing; "that's what I call free and easy!" Then turning round towards a table near them, at which Herbert was seated, examining a volume of engravings, she added, "Why do you not follow this good example, Herbert Otterborne? You might as well be at the Land's End as sitting here, for any good we young ladies get out of you."

Herbert rose, and approached her; nay, he even bent down, and addressed her in a smiling whisper.

"No! positively, that won't do!" she exclaimed aloud; "where is your footstool, Sir? You are not too proud, I hope, to sit upon a footstool at a young lady's feet, are you?"

"Not too proud, but too tall, my dear Miss Steyton," said Herbert, laughing; "I really dare not present myself before you in an attitude so ungraceful."

"That's all my eye!" exclaimed the beautiful Emily, also laughing, but more immoderately; "don't look shocked now. I know it's very vulgar,—at least among the English; but our French teacher declares that all elegant French women, particularly when they are young and handsome, say whatever comes into their heads first. That's the fashion, Mr. Herbert."

Mr. Otterborne tried, awkwardly enough, to smile,—but he bowed in silence.

"Come now," resumed the beautiful Emily "I won't have that! You are looking as stiff as a poker, and you shan't do any such thing. And as to your being too tall, Mr. Herbert, I'll just bet you anything you please, that he" (pointing to the almost recumbent Stephen) "is taller than you are. Stand up, you Mr. What's-your-name; stand up, I tell you, and let's see."

Stephen was on his feet in a moment.

Herbert Otterborne, it must be confessed, did look rather stiff, but to refuse the lady's challenge was impossible; and he, therefore, also stood tolerably erect, though by no means as loftily as he might have done, while the youthful but stalwart Stephen drew himself up to his highest possible altitude, and placed himself behind him, back to back.

As they thus stood, Stephen Cornington appeared to be at least two inches taller than the slighter-made patrician; the real difference between them being, perhaps, one inch; and

Emily, upon perceiving this result, clapped her hands boisterously together, exclaiming, in a voice of triumph, "I've won I've won!" Then lowering her voice a very little, she added addressing Miss Price, who stood beside her, with an arm lovingly passed round her waist, "What was the bet, Louisa?" and then, in a tone which was a very little lower still, she said, "If he had his wits about him, wouldn't he say it was a kiss Lou?"

Up to this point Janet Anderson, who had made one of the youthful group when the gentlemen entered, continued in her place beside Miss Steyton, but she now very quietly and very silently quitted her chair and stole away towards the sofa that was occupied by Lady Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews. The sofa was not a very large one, and though neither of the ladies who were in possession of it were particularly voluminous either in person or drapery, it had the appearance of being fully occupied. Mrs. Mathews, therefore, feeling that she could not very civilly place her pet, as bodkin, between Lady Otterborne and herself turned round to see if there were any unoccupied chair near them upon which Janet might seat herself; but before she turned her head again, to announce that there was one at no great distance, Lady Otterborne had made room for the slight intruder, not as bodkin, but by placing her beside her in the cushioned corner.

Janet thanked her with just such a smile as the act deserved but Mrs. Mathews began gently to expostulate, and to express her fear that her ladyship must be very uncomfortably crowded

"It is a sort of discomfort that I would willingly submit to very often," replied Lady Otterborne, "for the pleasure of having Miss Anderson near me."

This was very civil and very kind; and better still, it was very true.

It is rarely, I believe, that people are wise enough, when placed in such a position as to command a full view of what is interesting to them, but at the same time painful,—it rarely happens that persons so placed have the good sense to turn away, and look at something else. This sort of good sense had failed Lady Otterborne entirely from the time the three young ladies of the party had grouped themselves in the manner above described, before the window, for she had scarcely for a moment withdrawn her eyes from them. That the group was a very pretty one is quite certain; but, alas! this was not poor Lady Otterborne's reason for looking at it. The conscious

ness that the beautiful creature who decidedly made its principal figure was about to be the wife of her Herbert, gave an interest to her contemplation of it greatly beyond what any prettiness could produce.

But probably no spectator who knew Herbert less intimately than his mother did, could have been at all aware of the latent tragedy which she seemed so plainly to discern athwart the boisterous gaiety of her intended daughter-in-law. Many a tolerably refined lady, or gentleman either, might have found more of audacity than grace in the unmitigated display of beauty permitted by the dress of Miss Steyton : yet this might have been rendered infinitely less remarkable, had the movements of the young lady been less vehement ; but Emily Steyton was rarely still for a single moment, and unfortunately it was pretty nearly impossible that she could move at all without making the peculiarities of her costume still more apparent. Nor was this all. Her voice, which of itself had nothing offensive in it, being the sound clear organ of a young person in perfect health, was rendered positively painful in its loud vibrations by the vehemence with which all her sallies were uttered.

That Emily Steyton was conscious of her beauty, and proud of it, cannot be doubted, but she was rather prouder still of her vivacity. The great triumph of her existence, so far, had been the manner in which she had bullied her governess, and made all the teachers join in laughing at her, by her caricaturing mimicry of all she said and did.

Her own description of herself was, that she was the handsomest, the liveliest, and the richest girl in the school (which school, though kept in a very large house, was but little calculated to lower her pretensions or improve her judgment), and upon her return home, when she had completed her seventeenth year, her loudly declared intention was to be married as soon as possible, and to the very handsomest man she could find.

"Our French governess used to tell me," she said to Miss Price in one of their earliest confidential interviews, "our French governess used to tell me that a young married woman, if she happened to be both lively and handsome, might be more powerful, if she managed well, than any queen that ever lived ; and that if she was lucky enough to be rich too, she might turn the head of everybody she came near, and set the whole world spinning in whatever direction she liked. And that is just what I am determined to do," concluded the young lady, whirling herself round with equal vivacity and vigour, and making at

last a magnificent Dutch cheese by the help of her rich silk dress.

Unfortunately, most unfortunately for the peace of Herbert Otterborne, he was the first very handsome man who was presented to her as a waltzing partner upon her final return from school. Her resolution was immediately taken, rather more suddenly, and rather more decidedly, perhaps, in consequence of her being reminded by her friend, Miss Price, that if she did fall in love with Herbert Otterborne, and marry him, she would not only be young, beautiful, rich, lively, and married, but she would be "My Lady" into the bargain.

Very little time was lost before this resolution was acted upon.

Her father was duly informed that she must die if she did not marry, and very speedily too, the man of her heart; and as the man of money had a very proper respect for the man of title, and was perfectly aware that the Manor-house ranked considerably before the Lodge in county consequence, no opposition whatever was made by Mr. Steyton to the wishes of his daughter.

Obedient as he was in most cases, however, to the young lady's will, it is probable that he might have attempted some resistance on this occasion, had he been better informed as to the real situation of Sir Charles Otterborne's affairs. He knew, like everyone else in the neighbourhood, that he was a very extravagant man, but he knew also that his estate, or at least a considerable portion of it, was strictly entailed, and of the fortune unexpectedly bequeathed to Lady Otterborne, no one was left in ignorance who was in the least degree acquainted with Sir Charles, so that the retired tradesman thought it might not, on the whole, be easy to find a better match for his self-willed daughter, who he was quite aware would be likely enough to give him trouble if he opposed her.

But all this had been decided and acted upon so suddenly, that neither Herbert nor his mother either, were yet fully aware of all that was likely to give them pain in the arrangement. Though quite ignorant of the actual present ruin which threatened them, and which Sir Charles had at length confessed to his son, Lady Otterborne was too well acquainted with the character and gambling propensities of her husband not to be aware that such a fortune as that of Miss Steyton would be very desirable for him. The extreme beauty of the young lady, too, very naturally blinded her to the impossibility, on her son's part, of inclination having anything to do with the selection

which he had made ; and though the dress and manners of the beautiful Emily were very far from what she approved, her extreme youth and her apparent good temper suggested a reasonable hope of improvement. Yet still the idea of the marriage was distasteful to her, and if she had never yet fully expressed this to Herbert, it was because she could not endure the idea of using the influence which she knew she possessed over him, on a subject on which he alone ought to decide.

"For if he loves this beautiful young creature," thought she, "it is not my thinking her indelicate in dress, and coarse in manner and mind, which will console him under the loss of her!"

But before this visit to the Weldon Grange family was over, Lady Otterborne had seen enough to make her doubt the righteousness of suffering such a man as Herbert to unite himself to such a woman as Emily Steyton, merely because he admired and was dazzled by her blaze of beauty.

And then it was that an idea suggested itself to her, which was almost immediately acted upon.

"He shall," thought she, "at least have the opportunity of remarking the contrast between the delicate creature beside me and his lady love!"

And then she returned to the theme she had touched upon before, and told Mrs. Mathews and Janet that the former must kindly spare the latter to her for a long summer's day now and then. "If I did not remember her admirable father at all," said she, "I should still wish to cultivate the friendship of your Janet, Mrs. Mathews, but remembering him as affectionately as I do, I feel disposed to claim a right of partnership in her."

It was pretty nearly impossible perhaps, that any compliment could have been paid to Janet, from any source, which should have so highly gratified every feeling of Mrs. Mathews as this ; and the manner in which it was received, both by herself and by her adopted child, was such as to ensure a ready compliance with the flattering wish which Lady Otterborne had so cordially expressed.

Meanwhile the frolicsome Miss Emily continued to occupy the three young men completely.

To her affianced lover, who had taken the chair beside her which Janet had left, she spoke often enough (but always in a whisper) to have made his forsaking his station near her an act of great courtesy, even if the terms they were upon had not been such as to render it something worse still.

But this in no degree impeded her staring into the face of Stephen, who was still pretty nearly recumbent at her feet, and exchanging with him a multitude of lively jokes with as much familiar intimacy as if he had been a family friend of a dozen years' standing ; while pretty Mr. Price stood exactly in front of her, with his languishing blue eyes expressing more passionate admiration than anyone at a first glance would have thought him capable of feeling.

This was precisely such an arrangement as was calculated to keep up the *liveliness* of the heiress to the highest pitch, and accordingly she was very lively indeed.

Nor was it any drawback either to her happiness or her vivacity, that both her young female companions had forsaken her—Janet being disposed of with Lady Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews, on the sofa, and Miss Louisa thinking it best to amuse herself by looking at the moon. Neither were the other individuals of the party at all likely to disturb her amusement ; for Mrs. Price was endeavouring to keep herself awake by looking on at the whist-table ; Mr. King, who had long ago given up the idle attempt of keeping his eyes open after a dinner-party, was fast asleep ; and Mr. Steyton and the Vicar were discussing the probable necessity of an additional poor's-rate.

This state of things lasted for a considerable time, and might probably have continued a considerable time longer still, had not a sudden thought appeared to seize upon Mr. Stephen Cornington which caused him to spring upon his feet and rush to the pianoforte.

It certainly was not without a feeling of surprise that Mrs. Mathews watched his proceedings as he opened the instrument and seated himself before it. It did not occur to her as possible that this youthful importation from Barbadoes was really a musician, or at all likely to perform on the piano, excepting as a joke which might have produced much such harmony as a cat might do, if moving somewhat boldly over the keys.

Now the instrument was a very good instrument—everything in Mr. King's house was good—and moreover Mrs. Mathews had taken care to have it put in tune in case either of her young lady guests might like to perform on it. The sight therefore of this almost herculean young man preparing himself to disturb the whist-players, by putting the instrument out of tune, very much disturbed her serenity, and the more so as she did not exactly like to perform the part of a step-grand-

mother, and chide him from his purpose. But ere she had at all decided as to what might be the best means of stopping him, the pianoforte was opened and his fingers were galloping over the keys in the performance of a very learned, and brilliant prelude ; and, before she could in any degree recover her astonishment at this, one of the finest tenor voices it had ever been her fate to hear, began to warble in most enchanting style,

“We met—’twas in a crowd,” etc.

Whist-players can, for the most part, endure a wonderful amount of sound and movement round them, without giving any indication of having forgotten their game in order to think of something else ; but this unexpected outpouring of delicious notes, together with the dramatic feeling which the gifted performer gave to the words, seemed to electrify every one in the room, save the soundly sleeping host.

Lady Otterborne, after listening for a minute or two, gave an inquiring look at Mrs. Mathews, which seemed to say, “What is he ?” and presently after exclaimed, “Good heavens ! What a voice !”

The eyes of Janet were filled with tears.

Mrs. Price looked amazed, and her son and daughter frightened.

The priest laid down his cards upon the table, and crossing his hands over them, contemplated the performer in perfect silence, and with the earnest eye of one who was trying to unravel a mystery.

Sir Charles exclaimed, “The Devil !”

His son said nothing, but left his lady’s side, and stationed himself near the performer.

Mr. Steyton and his lady exchanged glances together, but this look of intelligence seemed rather to have reference to their beautiful daughter than to the accomplished Stephen, for that free and easy young lady had followed her lover to the instrument ; but she seemed to have forgotten him when she got there, for placing her two hands upon the back of the performer’s chair, she bent forward her head so as to have a good side view of his face, and remained very steadily in that attitude till the song was finished. Mr. Mathews and Mrs. Mathews alone seemed to feel more delight than astonishment. But this delight was wholly occasioned by the unmistakable effect which his grandson’s voice had produced, and not by the voice itself.

If Shakspeare's dictum be as right on this subject as it is allowed to be on most of the themes he touches, Mr. Mathews was by no means a trustworthy man, for most assuredly he had no "music in himself." Nevertheless it was he who was the most enchanted by this unexpected display, for he was by no means slow to discover anything, of any kind, which touched his vanity; and now, on perceiving that everybody was admiring his grandson, whom he had brought himself to consider quite as an *alter ego*, his delight knew no bounds. He clapped his hands vehemently in applause, but was speedily stopped short in this exercise by the priest, who of all the persons present was very decidedly the one most capable of forming a correct judgment of what he heard. "Where has your grandson been educated, Mr. Mathews?" said he, when the song was concluded.

"He was educated in Barbadoes, Sir," was the reply.

Mr. Cuthbridge elevated his eyebrows, upon receiving this answer, but said nothing.

Of course the consequence of such a performance was an earnest petition for another song. But Stephen was capricious, and not even Sir Charles' half-authoritative, half-coaxing address of,—

"Come, come, my dear fellow, you must give us another," appeared to have the slightest effect upon him; for he suddenly left the instrument, and darting into the hall returned thence with a great coat, a gentleman's hat, and a walking-stick. By some means, not very easily described to the uninitiated, he so arranged the hat and great coat on the stick, and then contrived to manoeuvre the fabric thus constructed by raising it above his own lofty head, as to give himself the appearance of a perfectly gigantic stature.

This of itself was enough to elicit the most vehement shouts of applause from Miss Steyton; but when in addition to this, he began walking round the walls of the room, as if to examine accurately the pictures suspended there, and by the skilful raising and sinking of the hat and coat, produced the ridiculously exaggerated effect of an anxious connoisseur, first standing on tip-toe, and then sinking almost on his knees, for the purpose of accurate examination, her raptures knew no bounds. She clapped her hands, and cried bravo till she was hoarse, and after following him round the room in this style till her strength seemed exhausted, she sank into an arm-chair, exclaiming,—

"Decidedly, Mr. Stephen, you are the most amusing animal I ever came near in my life, but if you go on in that style, you will certainly kill me."

"May the round world perish with you then!" he cried, dropping on one knee before her, in a comic, yet not quite ungraceful attitude; "but wait, oh! wait a while, ere you expire; and let the wretch, whose hope is to die with you, soothe your last moments and his own with a swan-like dirge."

And so saying he again bounded away to the pianoforte, and in a wonderfully skilful falsetto voice performed a magnificent Italian *bravura* which kept his hearers strangely suspended between admiration and laughter, for the performance was an admirable caricature,—admirable in every way,—of operatic singing.

The carriages were now announced. The rubber was brought to a conclusion, and the party broke up, but not before the handsome and amusing Cornington had received very cordial invitations from Sir Charles, Mr. Steyton, and Mr. Price, all the gentlemen declaring a very flattering conviction that he would be a "monstrous acquisition."

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

MANY neighbourly dinner-parties followed this, in tolerably quick succession, with some slight variations as to the guests; the Price family sometimes giving place to some others. But in no case was the brilliant Stephen Cornington omitted; and Mrs. Mathews had to endure the rather disagreeable, and very unexpected sensation, of growing more than heretofore in fashion in the neighbourhood that had known her so long, in consequence of Mr. Mathews' illegitimate son having left an heir.

"And is it possible," thought she, "that my sweet Janet actually counts for nothing in all this, while this blazing hollyhock is made the centre of all eyes, and the welcomed of all lips?"

Yes, so it was; or at least very nearly so. For who is there, that when giving a party, would not welcome more cordially a

young man, whose approach brightened every eye, and whose imagination in the invention of new and amusing vagaries seemed absolutely inexhaustible, than a quiet little girl, whose beauty, great as it was, rarely elicited unqualified admiration? For it was a very common saying at that time in the Weldon neighbourhood, that Miss Anderson would be very pretty if she were a little more animated, and certainly there was some truth in this. But how could any one appear animated in the presence of Emily Steyton? Or how could any intellect of any kind, or any manners of any mould, find popular favour when brought into competition with the romping full-blown loveliness and bold vivacity of the affianced heiress?

Nevertheless, while Emily was the unrivalled belle, and Stephen the unrivalled man of genius, of every drawing-room, there was a little under-current of different feelings going on in scenes less gay and hours less jovial, which, in a quiet way, was producing considerable effect.

Lady Otterborne did not abandon her project of having Janet often with her; nay, it sometimes happened that she was domesticated at the Manor-house for several days together. But although the increased intimacy which this sort of intercourse led to between the two families was of the most cordial and genuine kind, it was hardly possible that any people meeting so frequently, and with so much friendly and familiar unreserve, could understand less of each others hopes and wishes.

Mrs. Mathews, great as was her admiration of Lady Otterborne, and justly as she appreciated her noble character, would not so joyfully and so fearlessly have entrusted her Janet to her, had so attractive and every way admirable a son been in the way, *unengaged*,

But as it was, Mrs. Mathews was no more afraid of Janet's falling in love with Herbert than with his father.

On the other hand, there was nothing which would have pleased Lady Otterborne better, than that her son and Janet should mutually fall in love; for another of the many delusions which were afloat among these dear and intimate friends, was that Janet was a young lady of large fortune; a fallacy which Mrs. Mathews could never tax herself with having asserted, but to which she had most assuredly given birth, by her rather frequent allusions, when Janet was not within hearing, to her trustees in India. Neither was it possible that Lady Otterborne could have any reasonable fear, that by separating her son from

the beautiful girl to whom he had so very suddenly appeared to attach himself, she ran any risk of injuring the peace of the young lady ; for it was quite impossible not to perceive that if the unfortunate Herbert was not at his post by her side, his remissness seemed perfectly forgotten, as long as Mr. Stephen Cornington was there to take his place.

Another important delusion arose from the constant and successful care taken both by father and son to prevent any information respecting the real state of Sir Charles' affairs from reaching Lady Otterborne.

Had she known that the last five hundred of her thirty thousand pounds had been drawn out, she might not have looked on, perhaps, with so happy a spirit as she watched the daily increasing symptoms of the fair Emily's admiration of the stalwart and accomplished Cornington.

Nor were the real feelings of this young man himself less understood, or more falsely reasoned upon, than those of his new friends. For Janet he had positively conceived a very strong aversion. He had never forgiven her for not availing herself of his delicate subterfuge in order to conceal her early *tête-à-tête* walk with him ; nor had anything which had passed between them since, at all tended to lessen his dislike. Nevertheless, though he did not very often speak to her, he never failed to speak of her with the most enthusiastic admiration. Had not Mr. Mathews felt implicit confidence in the careful management of Miss Anderson's Indian trustees, he might now and then have felt rather anxious when he heard the object of all his hopes declare that he thought Miss Janet Anderson the loveliest girl he had ever seen in his life. But though this statement was always made in the presence of Mrs. Mathews, it never deluded her for a moment. It seemed as if she were endowed with a sort of instinct concerning all things connected with Stephen Cornington, and this instinct assured her most positively that Stephen hated Janet.

But admiration for Janet Anderson was not the only feeling which the young man thought it advisable to counterfeit. Whether in love with her or not it matters little, but Stephen had reasons of his own for wishing it to be believed that he was not in love with Emily Steyton, and it was believed.

And for other reasons of his own he also wished it to be believed that he was in love, or at least that he was very likely to be in love with Miss Louisa Price, and this, too, was believed. And then, again, Mr. William Price was really, and truly, and

very desperately in love with the beautiful Emily ; but he would rather have let anybody cut off his right hand, poor young gentleman, than have had it supposed for a moment that he could be guilty of such presumption.

Miss Emily Steyton, indeed ! with eighty thousand pounds down, and more, ever so much more, afterwards ! And she engaged to be married to Mr. Herbert Otterborne ! No ! He would rather, a great deal, run off, and leave the country altogether, than be guilty of such presumption ! ” And yet, poor young man, he really was very heartily in love, despite all the reasons he could bring to prove that such a thing was absolutely impossible.

But notwithstanding this accumulation of blunders, delusions, and mistakes, the little neighbourhood went on through all the bright summer months increasing in gaiety, hospitality, and social intercourse of all kinds.

When young people arrive in a new neighbourhood, where they are fortunate enough to become favourites, one invariable symptom of petting them is by arranging pic-nic parties for the sake of showing them whatever may be most worth seeing within the reach of a short excursion ; and of making themselves all particularly gay and happy at the same time.

Several of these agreeable excursions had this year taken place at Weldon. Sometimes a favourite hay-field, half-a-dozen miles off, had appeared a sufficient attraction. Sometimes a shady nook beside a limpid trout-stream ; and as the pic-nic passion raged strongly, and that the season was particularly favourable, the deep shade of a picturesque copse, provided it were sufficiently distant to require an hour or two of riding or driving to reach it, had been thought exceedingly well suited for the purpose.

Hertfordshire, though a very agreeable county, does not abound in what is called romantic scenery, and it was for this reason, perhaps, that the felicity-hunting inhabitants were so easily contented.

There was, however, one spot that had enough of beauty and of interest attached to it, to satisfy the most fastidious ; but it was nine miles from Weldon, and it was therefore never resorted to above once in the season, and not even that, unless the weather was considered to be particularly favourable and *trustworthy*, for the distance was too great to make a scramble home, in a sudden shower, an agreeable adventure.

Knightly Abbey, however, notwithstanding its somewhat

dangerous distance, was decided upon by our Weldon friends for their next pic-nic, and the day was to be that of the August full moon.

Several trifling circumstances had occurred since the Weldon Grange dinner-party, and more than one feeling, not trifling, had arisen among the parties present at it, which might have tended very essentially to alter their positions in relation to each other, had not something that seemed to be the iron hand of necessity, kept things pretty nearly in the same state as they were then.

For instance—Lady Otterborne's somewhat imprudent experiment upon the constancy of her son might have produced some very serious results before the month of August, had not the said iron hand of necessity prevented it. For, as her ladyship had very sagaciously imagined would be the case, the quiet loveliness of the very highly intelligent, but very gentle Janet, had produced exactly the effect she had foreseen; that is to say, her son had become as fully convinced as she could possibly be herself, that Emily Steyton was precisely of that “order of fine women” which his judgment the most heartily condemned, and from which his taste the most sincerely revolted—and also that Janet Anderson was most accurately and precisely the reverse.

And what had the devoted mother gained by her successful manoeuvring? But did the feelings thus roused tend in the very least degree to release Herbert either from his engagement, or the direful necessity for it? No. At the end of this three months' struggle between hourly increasing love and hourly increasing dislike, Herbert Otterborne continued as steadily determined to marry Emily Steyton as before it began.

Yet the unfortunate young man had not even the dignified and consoling consciousness of persisting in a purpose which ensured his own misery, solely from an honourable adherence to his pledged word; for the stringent necessity of the measure, as the only means of saving his mother from scenes which he firmly believed might rob him of her, was, undeniably, the real source of his constancy to a purpose which he perfectly well knew must make him wretched for life.

Whether Sir Charles so arranged matters as purposely to bring the danger which threatened his own freedom, as well as that of his household furniture, before the eyes and comprehension of his unhappy son, or whether accident did it for him, may be doubtful; but certain it is, that few days passed over

him without bringing some proof that the only way to save his mother was by the resolute sacrifice of himself.

And thus it was, that despite many very new and very powerful feelings, things still remained in *statu quo*.

As to Janet, the idea of falling in love with Herbert Otterborne had never entered her head for a single moment.

With his mother she certainly was very much in love. Young as she was, her observation and her judgment were sufficiently developed for her to be quite aware that Lady Otterborne treated her with a degree of flattering notice and consideration which she bestowed on no one else ; and there was a feminine charm in her companionship which made her frequent visits at the Manor-house the most enjoyable part of her existence.

She loved Mrs. Mathews with all her heart and soul ; she loved her really and truly, as if she had been her mother ; but in the beautiful, graceful, youthful-looking Lady Otterborne, she had a companion with whom she conversed as with an elder sister. This had all the charm of novelty, as well as every other, to enchant her ; for she had never had a sister, and might almost be said never to have had a friend, save her own father.

The conversing with Mrs. Mathews was, as she often thought, very like conversing with him ; and dearly did she accordingly value it.

But her intimacy with Lady Otterborne was altogether different. There was more of sentiment, more of imagination, more of poetry in it. It was a very dangerous and very doubtful device on the part of Lady Otterborne which had led to this ; but if it had not succeeded in breaking off her son's engagement with Miss Steyton, it had most assuredly added very greatly to her own happiness in another way ; and yet the more she became attached to her young companion, the more eager became her wish that her now apparently unpromising project might succeed.

Of the other personages of the drama, no avowed or very perceptible change could be remarked ; and when the day for the Knightly Abbey pic-nic arrived, the party met beneath the sheltering shadow of its venerable walls apparently in the same humour that they had parted many weeks before, after the Weldon Grange dinner party.

The company was the same, save that old Mr. King and the Catholic priest were not of it.

Neither love-making nor anything else ever prevented Herbert

Otterborne from taking care of his mother. It was not very often that she felt strong enough to join such a party as the present, but she had done so now chiefly, perhaps, because she wished to witness the pleasure which she was sure Janet would feel from the romantic beauty of the scene. Nor was she disappointed in this. The ruin is itself a very fine one, and the woodland scene in which it stands is admirably well calculated to add to the charm.

Sir Charles, Mr. Mathews, and Stephen Cornington, went on horseback. Herbert drove his mother, Mrs. Mathews, and Janet, in an open carriage ; and the Steyton and Price families each occupied their own.

The drive was rather a long one, for the latter part of it was very rough and slow driving ; and when the party had all assembled upon the soft turf, which now made the flooring of the long and graceful nave, it was voted *nem. con.* that the dinner should be immediately prepared, and the walk, which was to exhibit the beauty of the surrounding scenery to the strangers, taken after it.

This resolution immediately put all the servants into a state of great activity, and several of the gentlemen volunteered their assistance in preparing the splendid dining-room for the accommodation of the party. Chairs and a table were always to be had at a neighbouring cottage ; and everything else that reasonable hearts could wish for was brought forth from the carriages.

Herbert, as soon as he saw his mother safely treading the velvet carpet, which was kept in excellent order throughout the whole of the ruin, and saw her, too, with her arm passed through that of Janet, immediately placed himself, as in duty bound, and as a matter of course, at the side of Miss Steyton, and offered her his arm.

She took it very much in the same manner—that is to say, as a matter of course ; but any very watchful observer might have perceived that her eye wandered, and that she did not look up at his “beautiful head,” as she was wont to describe it, with such passionate admiration as heretofore.

In short, the truth must be told, and therefore it is more convenient to disclose it at once. The heart of the beautiful Miss Steyton was not a constant heart, but it was a very inflammable one.

In the interval between her leaving school and the period at which the reader has been introduced to her, she had already

had three love fits. The first was for a very dashing young nobleman, whom she had met at the county ball (the first at which she had ever appeared), and who, equally struck by her beauty and the uncouth vivacity of her manner, danced with her four times during the evening, and swore, when he gave a final pressure to her hand at parting, that unless some dreadful necessity tore him unexpectedly from the neighbourhood, he should be at her feet within twenty-four hours.

The enraptured Emily went home the most enamoured of maidens, and scrawled with a pencil, which she found on her dressing-table, the name of her noble partner, with the word "LADY" before it, merely as an experiment to see how it would look. Nay, before she went to bed—although the night's candles had long been burnt out, and that jocund day was peeping at her through the half-opened window shutters, she wrote her own name as "*Emily Cartagenet!*" at least half a dozen times on the fly-leaf of a novel.

In short, she was, as she would herself have acknowledged to anybody else as frankly as she did to her maid Minny, most violently and distractedly in love!

But unfortunately the "dreadful necessity," to which Lord Cartagenet had alluded as *possible*, undoubtedly occurred, for Emily Steyton never saw Lord Cartagenet again.

She bore her disappointment, however, wonderfully well ; assuring her confidential Minny that she did not care for the paltry fellow one atom more than she did for the man in the moon.

"A pretty idiot he must be, Minny ! must he not ?" said she, "not to get his own way in such a thing as that. I despise all such lovers and all such love !"

The second of her amatory fevers was, I am sorry to confess it, brought on by the audacious staring, and still more audacious familiarity of a young linen-draper, whose acquaintance she made at one side of a Hertford shop, while her mamma was buying a few dozen of dusters at the other.

"I tell you what, Minny," she had said on this occasion, "there is a young fellow at mamma's country linen-draper's that is worth a dozen young lords any day of the week. And what's more, you must find his name out : mind that, if you please. He has got the most beautiful, monstrous dark blue eyes that ever were seen ; and his hair is dark too, and curly naturally, and his teeth I do really think are almost as beautiful as my own, and his whiskers are divine, and he is very tall.

Now mind all that, Miss Minny, and let me know what the beautiful creature is called before I go to bed to-morrow night. And if you don't, you shan't have my last new bonnet but one, for months to come. Do you hear?"

Minny's reply, both in word and deed, was this, "To hear is to obey;" and, accordingly, by the hour of dressing for dinner on the following day, she was enabled to inform her young lady that the name of the youth in question was Robert Tomkins, though the importance of the information was very considerably lessened by the veracious Minny's feeling herself constrained to add, that the young man was married.

Miss Emily, however, behaved very honourably on this occasion, for she not only gave the bonnet alluded to above, in return for this very disagreeable news, but she had the courage to bind herself by a very solemn promise to Minny on the spot,—namely, that she never would look at any man's eyes again, till she had found out whether he was married or single.

"Not that I care one single farthing about Robert Tomkins," she added; "so, don't you take it into your head to fancy I do. Our French governess always used to tell us great girls, as soon as we were old enough to understand her, that the best thing a girl could do was to fall in love a good many times before she was married, because then she might have had enough of it, perhaps, and not be so likely to fall in love again afterwards. So I don't the least mind about Lord Cartagene, or Robert Tomkins either. I dare say it is all for the best."

It was in this state of mind that she had first become acquainted with Herbert Otterborne, that is to say, as a young lady who had completed her education; for he had been hard at work preparing for his degree at the time she was first "brought out." That she should immediately fall in love with him was, of course, inevitable, and accordingly she did fall in love with him.

But on this occasion the tender passion came upon her "with a difference." Her love, this time, was of a graver quality. She felt, as she told Minny, that she really was grown up now, and that being in love at present was not at all like being in love when she was a school-girl, nor even like the first falling in love after she came home. "Now, Minny, I know and understand all about it; and you will never again hear me talk such nonsense as I used to do."

Minny replied, with much discretion, that she was very glad to hear it.

"The great difference," resumed Emily, "is that *now*, when I fall in love, I mean really and truly to be married. And so I will, too, you may depend upon it. My papa never denies me anything, and I am quite sure he will not let me break my heart for love, and that is just what I shall do if I don't marry —somebody that I know of."

All that followed after this is already sufficiently known to the reader to make him comprehend why it was that the taking of Herbert Otterborne's arm appeared to be so completely a matter of course to the beautiful Emily.

But Stephen Cornington had not gazed upon her in vain! It was not in vain that he had passed many evenings after their first important interview at the Grange, in exerting all his talents, and all his faculties, in order to captivate her.

For a week or two, the agreeable notion of being engaged, kept her in some degree quiet, notwithstanding all the insidious attacks upon her peace made by the looks, the sighs, the songs, the dancing, the hand-pressings, and the occasional hints at self-destruction of Mr. Stephen Cornington. But by degrees she certainly began to suspect that Stephen was really and truly a monstrous deal handsomer than Herbert; and in this opinion Minny confessed that she too perfectly agreed; after which, all the conversations between the mistress and the maid on this interesting subject became most thoroughly sincere and confidential; for Minny no longer scrupled to avow, that, to her mind, the young squire at the Manor-house was a great deal too pale to be really handsome; but that as for Mr. Cornington, he was out-and-out the most noble gentleman to look at, that ever she had seen in all her born days.

Upon hearing this, Emily replied with her usual frankness, "Oh, as to that, Minny, I should not care a farthing about it. Though it is as true as gospel that he *is* the noblest-looking creature that was ever sent upon earth. But I should not mind *that* one farthing, I tell you, if it was not for his bewitching ways! A woman must be made of iron itself, Minny, to be looked at, as he looks at me, and not feel it! God knows what is to become of me! I suppose that, with all my money and all my beauty, I shall have to die of a broken heart at last."

And here the beauteous Emily positively began to weep.

Thereupon her *confidante*, as in duty bound, endeavoured to console her, by observing that, as long as a young lady was unmarried, it was never too late for her to change her mind. But in reply to this, the disconsolate Emily shook her head, observing

that it might do very well for a poor girl, like Minny, to change her mind as often as she liked, till she was absolutely and positively married ; but that it was a very different thing when a young lady of fortune, like herself, was engaged to such a young man as Herbert Otterborne, the heir of a title, and to the finest old place in the whole country.

“ Just fancy the rage of that terrible grandee, Sir Charles,” she continued, “ just fancy him, Minny, after arranging all about the settlements with papa, and sending for a London lawyer on purpose because papa was too gouty to go to London—just fancy, I say, my breaking off the match after all that ! I should die of fright in that case, not so much about papa as about Sir Charles. And it is as well to die of a broken heart as of a fright, you know ”

“ Upon my word, Miss, I don’t know what to say,” replied Minny, knitting her brows, and looking very much troubled ; “ it certainly does seem to be a very crooked business, and that’s a fact ; and if I was you, I would just go quietly on, letting things stay seemingly just as they have been, and who can say, Miss, but that by the blessing of God something may happen one way or another that may make it possible like for you to get off with the one and on with the other. If this handsome young Mr. Stephen loves you as he ought, he will find some way to give you a helping hand, I’ll be bound for it.”

“ Love me ! If he loves me ? If Stephen Cornington loves me ? Why, you idiot fool, he is mad for love of me !” cried the impassioned Emily—“ downright raving mad, I tell you ; and it must be a cleverer conjuror than you are to tell how it will all end !”

“ Mercy on me, Miss, if it don’t make me tremble from head to foot to hear you !” replied Minny ; “ you must know best, of course, Miss ; but to my humble thinking, it is no more than right that you should stand to all the scolding in the world rather than that love for you should lead to the murder and destruction of such a gentleman. It would take a great deal of cruelty to kill Squire Otterborne, Miss.”

These last words were accompanied by a little smile of the most provoking quality.

The only reply made by Emily was the stout stamping of her stout foot upon the carpet, and such a frown as might have terrified her attendant, had she not cleverly perceived that the feeling of anger which produced that frown was not for her, but for another.

This conversation occurred while the beautiful Emily was dressing for dinner on the day before that on which the pic-nic to Knightly Abbey took place; but the young lady was not aware that the whole of it was very faithfully reported to Mr. Stephen Cornington, in a bowery lane at no great distance from the Lodge, before the faithful Minny lay down to rest that night.

This slight retrospect was necessary to render what follows intelligible.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

WE must now return to Knightly Abbey. It was quite impossible that an *al fresco* dinner-party could have been more successful. The company, however, were not permitted to sit very long at table, except, indeed, those who insisted upon sipping their wine and eating their fruit, much as they might have done at home.

Sir Charles, Mr. Steyton, and Mr. Price were, however, the only individuals who had the boldness to declare that they preferred this to anything which they were likely to find in the neighbouring forest. The rest of the party set off with the avowed intention of taking a long walk; for as the driving home by the light of a full moon was upon this occasion no inconsiderable part of the promised pleasure, they had more time than usual to spare for their ramblings.

Herbert, however, knew perfectly well that a long walk must not be attempted by his mother; and it had been already agreed between Mrs. Mathews and himself that the lady of the Grange should be the companion of the lady of the Manor-house in a particularly sheltered nook, which contained a rustic seat, and which was sufficiently near the still occupied dinner-table to prevent any nervous feelings about their being left without protection.

"I must escort my mother and Mrs. Mathews to the bower I have prepared for them," said Herbert, addressing the whole of the walking party collectively, but with an especial bow to Emily; "but William Price knows the way to the Great Oak,

and I will join you there before you have had half time enough to admire it sufficiently ”

It took rather more time, however, than he had expected before he could succeed in rendering the sylvan shelter of his mother and her friend as comfortable as he wished it to be, for he had to ransack the carriages for cloaks, and then he had to arrange them in such a manner as to display all they wished to look upon, and at the same time to protect them from every breeze they might not wish to feel. But by the help of a little ingenuity and patience both these objects were accomplished, and Herbert Otterborne set off to join the walkers at the Great Oak tree. Altogether, they might, perhaps, have preceded him thither about twenty minutes ; but he knew that a circular seat round the noble stem of this magnificent tree offered a favourite lounging-place for all the visitants to Knightly Abbey, and he therefore indulged himself by passing with no very hasty steps along the beautiful forest glade which led to it.

Perceiving as he drew near that the seat was filled, though not very closely, all round the tree, he looked amongst them to discover the precise place occupied by the beautiful Emily ; but he soon discovered that she was not there.

“ You are looking for Emily,” said Mrs. Steyton, laughing ; “ but all things considered, Mr. Otterborne, you certainly tried her patience a little.”

“ I hope I have not detained you,” replied Herbert, colouring ; “ but I assure you,” he added, with a manner as gay as her own, “ I have been building a house since you left me. There was too much air for my mother in the drawing-room she and Mrs. Mathews have chosen for themselves, and I have been stealing all your cloaks to hang up round them.”

“ We all know that you are the very best son in the world,” replied Mrs. Steyton ; “ and I daresay you will find it no very difficult matter to make your peace with Emily. But where the child has run to, Heaven knows. I have no doubt she meant to punish you for keeping away from her so long, Mr. Herbert. But come along ! We shall find her in a few minutes I daresay ”

Thus challenged by his future mother-in-law, it was nearly impossible that Herbert could avoid offering his arm, which the plump lady accepted very graciously ; and they immediately set off on the usual well-known path to the little waterfall, which was the great lion of the forest, followed by the rest of the party

The waterfall, as it was rather ostentatiously called, was of a sort, to the construction of which art had contributed rather more than nature, but it answered its intended purpose admirably, for it furnished an object and a name just sufficient to fill up the hours of a pic-nic day

Both in going to this waterfall, and in returning from it, every individual of the party asked his or her neighbour more than once, this very obvious question : “ What can have become of Miss Steyton and Mr. Cornington ? ” But the question could produce no answer more satisfactory than “ Heaven knows ! ” As they approached the place where they had dined, however, some hopeful voices prophesied that they should be sure to find them with the party that had been stationary there. But these hopeful voices prophesied falsely, for when they arrived at the dinner-table, which was the place of rendezvous, they found the friends they had left there impatiently awaiting them ; but no Miss Emily Steyton, or any Mr. Stephen Cornington, either.

The sort of alarm occasioned by their absence, and loudly expressed by many of the party, may be easily imagined ; but all this was set very gaily to rights by the explanation of the young lady’s papa, who laughed heartily at the alarm of his friends, and said, “ I know Miss Emily a good deal better than any of you, I suspect, and I understand it all perfectly.” And then Mr. Steyton looked at his future son-in-law, and laughed again.

“ What can you mean, Mr. Steyton ? ” said the young lady’s mamma. “ I can’t imagine why you laugh in that strange sort of way, because Miss Emily chooses to keep us all waiting here. What *do* you mean ? ”

“ Well, then, my dear, if you *will* make me speak out, I will tell you what it is that I suspect has been the cause of it. It is just like the saucy beauty ! I suspect, then, Mr. Herbert Otterborne, that she took a jealous fit against your lady mother, because you stopped behind with her, you know, instead of giving your arm to your lady-love, and so she was determined to punish you a little. Well, well ! never mind, the lawyers cannot keep us much longer, I hope ; and as soon as they give the word, our skittish young lady must be ringed and yoked, and then you will be able to manage her.”

This long speech, though uttered with very genuine good-humour, did not seem to satisfy the party in general, many of them being evidently of opinion that Miss Emily’s whims furnished no very satisfactory reason for their being kept sitting

in the damp precincts of Knightly Abbey, instead of setting off for their respective homes.

Mrs. Mathews was the first to give utterance to the opinion, which was, however, no sooner expressed, than agreed to almost without a dissentient voice, that it must be useless and needless for the whole party to wait for the absentees, as Miss Steyton would have her papa's carriage, and Mr. Cornington the horse which had brought him thither, to convey them home.

The gentle voice of Mr. William Price was the only one which uttered any objection to this proposal ; but he, poor enamoured young man, ventured to hint that it would be very, *very* disagreeable for them to return home, absolutely without knowing whether Miss Steyton were dead or alive !

"Dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews, in a tone that expressed more ridicule than alarm. "Why what in the world should have killed her, Mr. William Price?"

"You may depend upon it she is very safe," observed Mr Mathews, gravely ; "for my grandson is not the sort of person to let a lady be exposed to any kind of danger as long as he is with her. You may depend upon it, ladies and gentlemen, that Mr. Steyton is in the right, and that there is no accident at all in the case, but only a joke."

"Nothing more, I daresay," said Lady Otterborne ; "but I am sorry to confess that I do not feel strong enough to wait the *dénouement* here, for I really am too much afraid of the night air to remain any longer. And, unfortunately," she added, turning rather ceremoniously towards Mr. Steyton, "unfortunately, I cannot offer to leave my son to await Miss Emily's return. For he drove us hither, and we cannot dispense with his coachmanship to drive us back. We have no servant with us but the groom who followed us on horseback, and I am much too great a coward to be driven by him."

"Of course Herbert must drive your ladyship home," said Sir Charles, in a voice of authority which was quite sufficient to settle the question in the opinion of all who heard him ; for, notwithstanding his debts and his difficulties, Sir Charles was still the great man *par excellence* of the neighbourhood ; "and you need not fear any great prolongation of your anxiety," added the baronet, turning to his son, "for I'll answer for it I will overtake you with tidings of the lost fair one before you have reached the Park Lodge."

Herbert made no reply, save by a slight inclination of the head ; but he immediately busied himself in finding the wraps

of his mother, and of the two Weldon Grange ladies who had accompanied her in her carriage, and then, after having uttered rather a hasty "Good night" to the rest of the party, he gave his arm to Lady Otterborne, and, closely followed by Mrs. Mathews and Janet, lost no time in placing them in the carriage which was already in waiting.

He drove them home pretty nearly at the same pace as he had driven when bringing them there ; but he was not destined to hear any further tidings of his affianced bride that night, for neither Sir Charles, nor any other individual of the party, overtook them ; at what hour his father might have returned, he knew not, for when Herbert retired for the night, he had not yet reached home.

Nor did Mrs. Mathews and Janet hear the end of the adventure that night, for they had both retired to bed before Mr. Mathews and his grandson made their appearance.

At breakfast the next morning, however, they had the satisfaction of being assured that no accident had happened to anybody, and that the delay of Miss Steyton's return to the oak-tree where she had left her companions, was owing to her having mistaken one forest path for another ; that which she had followed when she supposed she was returning to them, having led her in exactly a contrary direction.

This statement, which appeared to be as satisfactory to Mrs. Mathews and Janet, as it had before proved to Mr. Mathews, was, of course, given by Stephen Cornington, who concluded his little narrative by remarking that it was not very wonderful he should have blundered when the young lady desired him to lead her back to the oak-tree, inasmuch as he had never been in the forest before in his life.

"Very true, my dear boy !" cried his grandfather. " Unless you had steered by a compass, as the sailors do, I don't see how it was possible you should find your way through such a forest as that, being, as you are, a perfect stranger to it."

"I should have thought Miss Emily might have known every path in that forest by this time," observed Mrs. Mathews ; "I am sure she has been there often enough ; for when she was a child of ten years old, her father always insisted upon her being included in every pic-nic."

"Is it possible ?" returned Stephen, looking greatly surprised by the statement. "I told her fairly, when she said that she did not choose to stay away long from the others, I told her at once, that never having been there before, I was much more

likely to go wrong than right ; upon which she said, ‘Very well, then, Mr. Stephen, I will lead you,’ and so she did, and my firm opinion is, that she went round and round for mere fun, and, so indeed, I almost thought at the time, and then it was that I said I would find the way for her myself. And by the greatest good luck I did turn right at last, and brought her back quite safe, though I believe she was both tired and frightened.”

“Frightened !” said Mrs. Mathews. “I should not think Miss Emily was at all likely to be frightened. She appears to me to be a young lady of great courage.”

“So much the better for her, my dear,” said Mr. Mathews ; “I consider that the being over timid is a great misfortune either for a man or a woman. However, I can’t help thinking that our beautiful neighbour, Miss Emily, really was frightened when she came back to us last night ; for she certainly looked a little what we call scared, you know”

“Indeed ! What could have scared her, I wonder ? Did anything unpleasant happen to her, Mr. Stephen ? I should have thought that any of us might have walked through that peaceful little wood at midnight, without running the least risk of being scared,” said Mrs. Mathews ; “unless, indeed, the young lady should be afraid of ghosts,” she added.

“I cannot think what put it into your head, Sir, to say that Miss Steyton looked frightened,” said Stephen, expressing, for the first time since his arrival, an opinion which seemed at variance with that expressed by his grandfather. “Tired,” he added, “she might be, for really I was tired too, but as to her being frightened, I think that was quite a mistake.” And here the subject dropped.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

LADY OTTERBORNE, before she parted with Janet upon the night of the pic-nic, had obtained from her, and from Mrs. Mathews, a promise that she should pass the whole of the following day at the Manor-house, and this day was to begin immediately after breakfast, as the walk across the park was

by no means a very shady one, and the weather too hot to make the mid-day sun agreeable.

Mrs. Mathews, therefore, was left alone in her old retreat at an early hour, and felt as she sat herself down at an open window to enjoy a gentle brecze from the west, that she had a long day before her, which might be given, if she so willed it, to meditation. And as it happened, this prospect pleased her well, for the good lady felt that she had a great deal to think about, and that this process could be carried on better in the absence of her Janet than in her presence.

When sober-minded, reasonable people have been informed, upon the best possible authority, that a gentleman is engaged to be married, and that his marriage-settlements have for several weeks been in the hands of the lawyers, the said sober-minded reasonable people are for the most part, disposed to consider the said gentleman's prospects in life, at least in the matrimonial line, to be too far fixed and settled to leave room for much speculation concerning him.

But it was otherwise in the case of the sober-minded Mrs. Mathews and the engaged Mr. Herbert Otterborne. The narrative she had listened to from the unfortunate young man himself had pained her to the heart; and scarcely a day had passed since without bringing something to her eyes, or her ears, tending rather to increase than diminish her anxiety concerning him.

Much as Lady Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews appeared to like each other, they had never yet been on terms of sufficient intimacy to render the discussion of so very delicate a subject possible between them. In her own heart, Mrs. Mathews had not the shadow of a doubt but that the proposed connection must be in the highest degree distasteful to Lady Otterborne, and her lamentations for the unfortunate fate of the son, were rendered the more doleful by her profound pity for the mother.

But from the day on which Herbert had explained to her the whole of his most painful situation, he had never again referred to the subject; and had it not been for the very frequent allusion to the approaching marriage in which the well-pleased fathers of both parties indulged, she might have been tempted to hope that this threatened misery had been in some way or other averted.

But as it was, no such hope was left her. Neither had she the comfort of discussing this subject with as much perfect confidence with Janet, as she permitted herself on every other.

For she had more than once fancied that the complexion of Janet had varied upon the sudden mention of Herbert's name ; and more than once she had marked her with a book open in her hand while her eyes were fixed upon the carpet, or the 'turf at her feet.

Such observations would have made her most completely miserable, had not the youth of Janet reassured her. "No !" thought Mrs. Mathews, "it is not at seventeen that very deep impressions are received. At *twenty-eight* a love fit is a very different affair."

But the adventure of yesterday had left a deep impression on her mind, and she was glad of an opportunity of sitting down alone, to *think it out*.

There had been a cold, stiff, stately indifference in the manner of Herbert when the question of waiting, or not waiting, for the young lady, had been discussed, previously to their leaving the ruin on the preceding evening, which puzzled her. Was it possible that such a man as Herbert Otterborne could be really indifferent to so gross a violation of propriety in the woman to whom he intended to give his name ? Was it possible that he could permit such an occurrence to pass without observation or remonstrance ? And how were observation and remonstrance likely to be received by such a young lady as Miss Emily ? And what result might it not lead to, if ventured upon to her father ?

Mrs. Mathews might have given herself a less satisfactory answer had she more thoroughly understood the state of mind to which the unfortunate Herbert had brought himself. She certainly did not give him either the credit or the discredit of feeling any great admiration for the beautiful Emily's person, manners, or mind. But nevertheless she was far from being aware, that the only process by which he had been able to conquer the feeling, nearly approaching to antipathy, which she inspired in him, was the systematic hardening of himself to the endurance of the dreadful position in which he was placed, and not by the flattering belief that anything could make it better.

He had a sort of stern conviction, indeed, that nothing could make it worse, and that, such as it was, he was bound to bear it, both for the sake of his mother's welfare, and for the honour of his own pledged word, pledged to his own father, and through him to the wealthy beauty herself, as well as to her parents.

In short, Herbert Otterborne had the miserable consciousness that all the most heroic strength of mind which he could call to his aid could avail him nothing, excepting as it gave him power to endure the evils which beset him ; and that weakness of character, indifference to his mother, and contempt for his own pledged word, were the only resources to which he could look as a means of escaping from them.

Mrs. Mathews therefore was reasoning very perfectly in the dark, when her busy thoughts were urging her to the pleasant conclusion that it was quite impossible such a man could persevere in his intention of marrying such a woman ; for such a man was the very last to consult his own wishes on the subject.

While she was still very earnestly engaged in meditating upon this theme, Sally Spicer brought her the always welcome intelligence that Mr. Cuthbridge had called, and begged to know if he might be permitted to come upstairs. This was a privilege which no man of any age or of any faith throughout the whole neighbourhood would have ventured to claim ; excepting, perhaps, the young squire of the Manor-house, and even he generally waited till he was asked ; for *the stairs* in this case decidedly meant the corkscrew stairs, and not even the husband of our dear Mrs. Mathews would have ventured to make such a request.

But Mr. Cuthbridge not only made it, but felt so certain of its success, that he followed the steps of the messenger so closely, as to be ready to enter the room as she left it. There were, in truth, few things that Mrs. Mathews liked better than a visit from the Catholic priest. Their friendship had been of long standing, and nothing had ever occurred to shake it ; and they now sat down together, with the comfortable intention of having a long chat.

Was there ever a Catholic priest yet who was not a gossip ? Probably not, if he was a true priest. But the gossip of a priest is generally a sort of one-sided gossip, hearing all things, but by no means telling all things. And if I had now to follow the priest and confessor of Proctor Castle into any other room in Hertfordshire, save and except the den of Mrs. Mathews, I might have to record the same of him.

But the tenant of the den and the confessor of Proctor Castle were on very singular terms with each other, for they conversed in a manner more nearly approaching equality and mutual confidence than it is usual to find between persons so differently

situated. This had been produced partly by time, partly by accident, and partly by the peculiar character of the parties. Mr. Cuthbridge had first taken a fancy to Mrs. Mathews because she was a very tolerably good botanist, and very passionately fond of flowers ; and this fancy had been very strongly increased by the admission of Mr. Cuthbridge into the den, for the purpose of showing him some interesting plants which were undergoing the process of drying, by an invention of her own.

This had occurred when Mary King was about thirty years old ; and then it was that he discovered in what sort of manner she passed the many solitary hours which her neighbours supposed she devoted to her scientific gardening. He saw her polyglot collection of books, he saw her worn-out grammars, and her much-thumbed dictionaries ; and having forthwith proceeded to a pretty strict cross-examination, he became so strongly and so affectionately interested in her studies, that, for the future, no assistance in them which a profound and accomplished scholar could give, was wanting.

Had any such assistance been given to her in any pursuit less secret than that of her classical studies, the friendship between them, though it might have been equally lasting, would certainly not have been so intimate. Their intercourse from this time became perfectly confidential, for Mr. Cuthbridge was too acute a man not to perceive that Mary King's wish to keep her studies secret, was genuine as the ardour with which she pursued them ; and her steady, quiet perseverance, both in the pursuit and attendant secrecy, gave her a place in his estimation which no qualities of a more ordinary nature would have been able to excite. For the priest was himself an eccentric sort of person, and the unusual nature and manner of Mary King's studies, made her an object of no common interest to him.

The gossip, therefore, which now ensued between them, must not be deemed unnatural, merely because it was in a tone of unreserve not usual between Catholic priests and Protestant ladies.

"Where is your little girl ?" were the first words pronounced by his reverence, after the door was closed upon them.

"My little girl is gone to pass the day at the Manor-house," replied Mrs. Mathews.

"And where is your not very little boy ?" was his next question.

"By which phrase you mean to designate my new grandson, I presume?" returned his friend.

The priest nodded affirmatively.

"I do not know where he may be," said she. "We do not spend our mornings together very often. But I daresay I can learn where he is. Do you wish to see him?"

"No; I wish not to see him," returned Mr. Cuthbridge. "I have seen him once to-day already, and that will suffice me. But I want to talk about him. How long do you think he is likely to stay here?"

"I should be exceedingly well pleased if I could tell you when he was likely to go," replied Mrs. Mathews; "for, as I have told you already, my good friend, I do not like him. But though Mr. Mathews perpetually talks of finding a profession for him, I have no faith in his really wishing to part with him."

"Nor I, either. Neither do I think that the young gentleman himself has any inclination to go," replied the priest.

"Probably not," returned his companion. "And now that we are on the subject of Mr. Stephen Cornington, I wish you would tell me for which of his good gifts it is, that you have conceived so great a liking to him?"

"Has he told you that I have conceived a great liking to him?" demanded the priest, with rather an expressive smile.

"Not explicitly, in so many words," she replied; "but he has said much from which such an inference may be drawn."

"And you have drawn it?" said he.

"I scarcely know whether I have or not," was her answer. "It is, however, at least certain," she added, "that you have no objection to his society; for I know you well enough, Mr. Priest, to be very certain that you would not permit such frequent visits from him if you did."

"He tells you of his frequent visits, does he?" said Mr. Cuthbridge.

"Oh, yes!" she replied; "it is evident that he is very proud of their frequency."

"And how has he explained that frequency?" said he. "Has he ever hinted at any cause for it?"

"I must again answer, not *explicitly*. But he has given us reason to suppose that you are a good deal pleased, and a good deal surprised also, at his scholastic acquirements."

Mr. Cuthbridge covered his face with his hands, but when he removed them the laugh he had affected to conceal was still upon his features.

"It is a thousand pities he should not be a priest!" said he; "I have rarely met any one more pre-eminently qualified for it."

"If I had said that," observed Mrs. Mathews, "you would have declared it to be another proof of my inveterate prejudices against your sacred order!"

"It is very likely I might," he replied; "but you would have spoken it in a different manner, and you would have deserved the reproof. But I do not see any very good reason," he added, after the pause of a few minutes,—"I really do not see any reason at all why I should conceal from you the real cause of this boy's visits to me. Our intercourse—yours and mine, I mean—has so long been one of mutual confidence, that the persevering in making a mystery between us on this point, would, I believe, be very absurd. The secret is this:—Young Mr. Cornington is a Papist, and ready, as I think, to go any lengths, in order to prove, to my satisfaction, that he is a desperately bigoted one."

"You astonish me!" cried Mrs. Mathews. "How very strange it seems that he should not confess this to his grandfather!"

"No, my friend; you are mistaken. There is nothing at all strange in it. The very word you have yourself used might serve to convince you, if you were a little less ignorant, that you are wrong. *Confess* to his grandfather, indeed! What business has a Catholic to confess anything to anybody, save his confessor? The young gentleman put the question to me, as a case of conscience, whether he might keep his faith secret or not, avowing at the same time that he should greatly prefer doing so, and, therefore, as it did not seem to me that it signified a straw to anybody, whether he kept it secret or not, I told him to follow his own judgment in the matter."

"Was his grandmother a Catholic?" said Mrs. Mathews.

"What! your rival?" returned Mr. Cuthbridge, laughing. "I do not know; and, to say the truth, I do not greatly care; but if you have any anxieties, jealous or other, on the subject, I will immediately make it my business to ascertain."

"I would not willingly give you any unnecessary trouble, Mr. Cuthbridge," she replied; "and therefore we will pass from the grandmother to the grandson. Do you really believe that he is a Papist? Or has he only assumed this shape in the hope of ingratiating himself with you?"

"No, no!—he has been brought up as a Papist; you may take my word for it."

"Does he confess to your reverence?" said she.

"Yes; he confesses to my reverence," he replied, and there he stopped.

"I wonder how many years it will take before I shall feel that I thoroughly understand you?" said Mrs. Mathews, thoughtfully.

"You say that because, after confessing to you that he confessed to me, I stopped short, leaving you quite in the dark as to what the nature of his confession might be. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps so," she replied. "But are you not a puzzling priest? Have we not discussed—and discussed freely—many themes which I am quite sure you never would have touched upon with me, had I not inspired you with some feeling of confidence in my discretion?"

"And I have great confidence in your discretion, as I fail not to prove to you, my good lady, every time we meet. It would be a serious blow to me were you to publish to the world in general, or to my Lord Proctor in particular, that I did not believe in transubstantiation, and some few other mysteries; yet, nevertheless, I have told you this, and a good deal more, without feeling the slightest shadow of suspicion that I was running any risk of being betrayed. Is not this a sufficient proof that I have confidence in your discretion?"

"Yes; it is a proof that you do not wrong me by any very foul suspicion on this head," she replied; "and so far I am flattered, and I am grateful. But it is evident, good friend, that this confidence in me has its limits."

"Limits more strict than those which you assign to your curiosity, good friend," returned the priest, laughing.

"There again is a proof that, despite our confidential friendship, we do not thoroughly understand one another," said she. "I have no feeling in the least degree resembling curiosity, respecting Mr. Stephen Cornington's conscience. But I do not think well of him, and he is, unfortunately, so intimately mixed up with our family, and our family concerns, that I should not be sorry to know what he is really doing and going to do; and particularly whether there is any real chance of our getting rid of him, by his adopting any of the various plans and projects which he and his grandfather are perpetually discussing in our presence, any of which would be, I confess, very welcome to me, as a means of removing him."

"If I learn that there is any such chance for your relief, I

will relax my rule a little in your favour, and give you a hint of it," was his answer.

"Thank you, that is all very well, and I will limit my curiosity, as you call it, to that point. But now let us leave Mr. Stephen, and his conscientious disclosures, out of the question, and let us discourse a little upon the beauty of consistency. How can you, puzzling priest as you certainly are,—how can you talk to me, as you have so often done, of all the frightful fallacies taught to poor deluded and confiding human beings in the name of the Catholic religion, and yet pretend to speak of that frightful mummery, oral confession, with respect? Remember, too, if you please, that it was no breach of social or friendly confidence, that I asked for,—such confidence, for instance, as that existing between you and me. But you know perfectly well that it is utterly impossible any such confidence, or, in fact, any confidence at all, can exist between you and this boy. It is, therefore, merely as a religious rite, that you hold anything that he can utter to you as sacred. Wherefore I say again that you are a puzzling priest."

"I will not let you call me so, Miss Mary,—I beg your pardon,—I will not let you call me so, Mistress Mary. Our acquaintance has, from first to last, been a very queer one; and the queerest feature of all is, that because you trusted me, and me alone, with the secret of your classic lore, I should have thought it fitting to trust you, and you alone, with the secret of all my infidelities to the Pope; yet it seems that I have not told you enough yet to make you understand me. I have often suspected that you blamed me in your heart for not declaring aloud that I would be a priest no longer, and now I am quite sure of it."

Mrs. Mathews bowed her head in very decided accordance to this statement.

Mr Cuthbridge was silent for a moment, and then said, "You are a very benighted woman, Mistress Mary. I have taught you a little Greek and a good deal of Latin, and, as the ghost says, I have found thee apt. But you have not contrived to pluck out my mystery as cleverly as I think you might have done."

"Then, have I not a right to call you puzzling priest?" said she.

"Perhaps so," he replied; "yet still I do not like it, and you shall call me so no longer. The time has been, dear old friend, when not even to such a one as you would a man of sober judg-

ment have said what I will say to you, if you will listen to me ; and that because the trusted listener would have been as much endangered as the trusting speaker. But, thanks to the Heaven that is above all, that hideous period of human insanity is over —staking and burning are as completely out of fashion as hair-powder and hoops. Some few fantastical imitations of persecutions, in the name of the Most High, may now and then be heard of still, in poor dear worn-out Rome and its dependencies ; but there is no more resemblance between their present doings in this line and the doings which have been, than between the hoops and hair-powder of a fancy ball, and the hoops and hair-powder to which all the nations of the civilized world once submitted themselves."

"And may the Ruler of all things maintain such doings in that position !" fervently exclaimed Mrs. Mathews ; to which the priest very cordially said, "Amen !"

"Nevertheless," said he, "I would still have a powerful priesthood, and still have a company of Jesuits."

"But I must not call you puzzling, nevertheless," said she.

"You will only prove your own dulness if you do," he replied ; "for there is nothing puzzling in me. The first object of all human beings is the attainment of power. Nay, I am not certain that it is not the first object of every creature that lives. Do not the bees seek power when they sting the drones to death ? Does not the dog seek power when he worries the cat ? And does not the innocent babe seek power when he slaps his nurse ? In short, it is a primal law of nature, and is shown quite as visibly, but perhaps more pleasantly, in our persevering efforts to obtain a mastery over the principles and the results of mechanical operations, making them to obey our bidding and effect our will."

"Granted !" said Mrs. Mathews ; "and what then ?"

"Why then," resumed Mr. Cuthbridge, "it becomes evident that power is a lawful aim."

"Power ! yes," said Mrs. Mathews ; "but not the abuse of it. I am willing to allow that it is 'lawful as eating,' but not that its abuse can ever be so."

"No more is gluttony. Everything that is injurious either to ourselves or to others is a sin," replied the priest ; "and, depend upon it, that we shall all find that out by-and-by ; but, in the meantime, the wisest and most advanced in knowledge, having already reached that period of experience which shows that power is the one thing needful for prosperity in this our present

state of being,—they have very wisely directed all their efforts to the acquirement of it; and if this be a true abstract of the natural history of man, tell me what portion of the human race have shown most wisdom?"

"I see where you are, Sir Priest," replied Mrs. Mathews, knitting her brows, and looking very far from satisfied; "I am to answer your question by meekly replying 'THE CHURCH, so please your reverence.'"

"You will never be meek so long as you live, Mistress Mary; that is not in your nature, though the love of power is," he replied. "But if you were a holy lady abbess, instead of a sceptical Mrs. Mathews, you would admire and reverence the church for its success in the pursuit of that which is the aim of all."

Mrs. Mathews meditated for a moment, and then said: "It seems to me, Mr. Cuthbridge, that if you do your duty, you will immediately exert yourself to open infant-schools for the special purpose of teaching the art of lying, in the most direct and simple form. Your next step should be to institute an academy for the more complicated exercise of the same noble art; and then you should proceed to the foundation and endowment of colleges."

"You are quite right, my dear Mrs. Mathews," said the priest, interrupting her; "but are you not aware, my good friend, that this is precisely what the church has done? I believe you know that I have myself been brought up as a Jesuit, and I assure you that what you now propose in irony is what we have done for ages, with very stedfast intensity of purpose. We are perfectly sincere as to our object, although with the wisdom, and perhaps the subtlety of the serpent, we permit ourselves to use fraud as a means of obtaining it."

"And how can you," returned Mrs. Mathews, vehemently,—"how can you, with a mind as bright and clear as light itself,—how can you beguile yourself into the belief that such a system can be righteous?"

"Show me any other by which power can, as yet, be as effectually obtained, and I will at once abandon the defence of this," he replied.

"But wherefore the necessity of such power?" said she.

"What do all the justly-vaunted labours of man tend to?" demanded Mr. Cuthbridge, gravely. "Is not all he does, as I told you just now, for the acquisition of power—whether scientific or mechanical—whether in astronomy or in agriculture—

whether drudging through experiment or soaring into metaphysics—is not the acquisition of some sort of power or other the real object?"

"Not the ultimate object," she replied. "All who thus seek power are labouring for the benefit of the human race."

"And so are we," said Mr. Cuthbridge. "Enough has already been recorded of the history of man to show that, with all his glorious faculties, he has not yet discovered the secret of turning his enormous resources to the best account. There be many who assert that man is neither better nor worse than he was at the earliest periods of time. Morally, this may be so;—it is not very easy, perhaps, to institute a fair comparison. But is there any one bold enough to say that he has not advanced in knowledge? Is there any one so blind as not to perceive that this advance is made by a movement that is constantly accelerating as it goes on? Does not every golden egg, begot between science and experience, contain the germ from which undreamed-of varieties of knowledge may spring? And how is this vast mass of knowledge to be turned to the best account? Does not all analogy teach us that the sagacity which directs the application of power is as important as the power itself? If all that is already known had been systematically applied to moral as well as physical improvement, the condition of mankind would be rather better than it is at present. But in order to attain this end, it is necessary to study the great art of converting all things that exist into one mighty engine of power."

"And is it part of your creed, Mr. Cuthbridge, that the Almighty has created Roman Catholic priests as the fitting possessors of such power?" said Mrs. Mathews.

"I do not believe that either you or I, or any one else who thinks like us, would deem it wisdom to theorise in any very authoritative manner upon the ultimate purposes of the Almighty," he replied; "but I have no scruple in saying, that the only set of men to whom it has occurred that they might achieve power by taking possession of the minds of human beings, are the Jesuits. And they not only conceived the project, but they have put it, and kept it, in execution. I will refer you, Mistress Mary, to your own sound and solid acquaintance with history, for an answer as to what, I presume, would be your next question; namely, What have they achieved by this project? The answer will be,—that they have exercised a degree of power over the human race that transcends all other earthly power to a degree that defies the reach of calculation."

"Do you say this in praise of them?" said she.

"I certainly say it in praise of their sagacity," he replied. "Alexander was a great man; he desired conquest, and he achieved it. So did Napoleon. But what were their exploits,—what was their success,—what was the result of them, compared with what has followed from the stupendous project of Loyola? While others were seeking the possession of cumbersome territory or of vaporous renown, the Jesuits have been going on, from age to age, in bringing the human will under subjection; and their success in this has enabled them to have, and to hold, a power that has endured longer, and produced more important effects than any other which has ever been exercised by man on man."

"But has this enormous influence been a benefit or a curse to mankind?" demanded Mrs. Mathews, very sternly.

"You think this question a very easy one to answer," returned Mr. Cuthbridge; "but I think otherwise. We must remember, you know, that the end is not yet; and in saying this, I am not referring to the world to come, but the world that is. The good we owe to the Jesuits is the conception of a system by which the immense faculties bestowed on man, instead of being frittered away by individual efforts, and with individual whims, MAY BE rendered effective by union."

"And, in my judgment, the most melancholy fact that history records, is the success of this system," said Mrs. Mathews, with a groan.

"And perhaps I think so, too, Mistress Mary," replied the priest, taking her hand, and cordially pressing it; "so do not hate me. Jesuits, you know, after all, are but men, and they are therefore liable to error in common with the rest of the species. I by no means think that there is any natural necessity for their doing all the very dirty work which we too well know they have been in the habit of performing, in order to produce all the beneficial effects upon mankind which MIGHT be produced by the stupendous power they have invented. But not the less do I admire the profound sagacity which conceived the possibility of putting it in action."

"Surely I do not understand you!" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews, in an accent of astonishment. "What can you find to admire in the principle which caused a set of cunning men to unite themselves for the purpose of cheating all mankind?"

"You do not put the case fairly," he replied; "my admiration is for the grand principle of uniting many wills and many

intelligences upon one object. And when we consider the small numerical amount of those who have derived personal aggrandisement from the system, compared to the thousands who have faithfully devoted themselves to it, we cannot deny them the praise of immense sincerity of purpose, and unflinching constancy in the pursuit of that system."

"That purpose being the propagation of fraud," said Mrs. Mathews. "The desperate sincerity of purpose which must be in the heart of a murderer," she added, with a shudder, "might as reasonably be cited as a claim to respect."

"But murderers have all, more or less, worked for what they believed to be their own interest, or else for the gratification of their own vengeance," rejoined the priest. "Not so the Jesuit. His power, and the sort of sublimity that attaches to it, rests not solely on his sincerity of purpose, but on that abnegation of self which leads to risk and to suffer all things for the furtherance of an object that is not selfish. The magnates among them know, and have ever known, from Loyola downwards, that finer and more precious materials for power were to be found in the mind of man than even in the bowels of the earth, and that a system by which these materials could be wrought upon by the action of the higher order of intellect upon such as were inferior, would produce in the aggregate, a force which might rule the earth as easily as a little engine propels a luggage-train. So far they are right. Their dogma is a true dogma, and a very grand one. But here, I confess, dear Mistress Mary, the praise stops short, and reprobation, malediction, and execration, if you will, very fitly begins; for although this power of mind over mind, if righteously applied, might convert earth into a stepping-stone to heaven, yet made use of, as, alas! we know it has been, it may be considered as a damnable witch-light, to beguile confiding spirits into a path that leads the other way."

"Most true," replied Mrs. Mathews; "and this ought, methinks, to be a lesson to us. It should teach us that one set of men ought not to assume the right of ruling the minds of another set of men. Ruling their actions is a very legitimate governmental operation; but ruling the mind is not. There is something impious in the very idea."

"There would be nothing impious in it," replied the priest, solemnly, "if ONE single and simple condition were annexed to the power. If a society could be formed, wide-spreading and powerful as that of the Jesuits, which should consent to guide

itself by the first natural law that divides good from evil; namely, the law which divides truth from falsehood; and teach a strict, bold, fearless, unflinching adherence to truth, in word and deed, instead of a strict, bold, fearless, and unflinching adherence to falsehood; that company might indeed be called the Company of Jesus. And where, save in heaven itself, is the limit to which such a rule might not lead us? Depend upon it, friend Mathews, that poor unfortunate dreamer, Fourier, had some such thing in his thoughts."

" You are not going to propose, I hope, by way of a cure for all our woes in this 'vale of tears,' that we should be shut up in Phalange pens, like fat sheep at Smithfield?" said Mrs. Mathews.

" No; but I believe, priest though I be, that poor Fourier, all madman as he was, had now and then a ray of light breaking in upon him, and that had he been as clear-headed as he was honest, he might have done good, either in his generation or after it. But a fatal fallacy was mixed up with all his notions. He had not heard, or he had not understood, that very profound political axiom put forth by Shakspere,—

'Strength will be lord of imbecility.'

That little line contains a truth which knocks down, and rolls in the dust for ever, that vainest of all human notions,—EQUALITY. If God had intended that men should be equal, he would not have made one a Newton and another a ninny. But he has given, *amongst them*, power enough to work their way onwards and upwards,—how far or how high, it is difficult to say. But, I repeat it, Mistress Mary, were a union as mighty as that of the Jesuits to be formed, which would advocate the cause of truth, as courageously and as skilfully as they have advocated the cause of falsehood, the moral advancement of the human race would beat steam in speed, and chemistry in acuteness. So much for speculation," said the heretical priest, rising. " But, however much we may differ on other subjects, there is at least one on which we shall be sure to agree, namely, in the interest we feel for that noble fellow, Herbert Otterborne, and in our being both equally anxious that he should not marry any one very particularly unworthy of him. As to the matter of confession, I do not wish to delude you, old friend, into believing me to be a more faithful priest than I am. It is *not* from any reverence for priestly practice or for priestly rule, that I am averse to use information so obtained. It is merely

a sort of gentleman-like reluctance to betray any confidence, unless indeed, some moral obligation stronger still, should oblige me to do it. And now, farewell."

"I thank you heartily for the conclusion of your homily, Sir Priest," replied Mrs. Mathews; "you positively frightened me at its commencement. But now, after all your elaborate explanations, I find you very nearly the same sort of being that I thought you before."

"Well, Mistress Mary, I will be content with that. Farewell!"



#### CHAPTER XXXIV

It may easily be imagined that such a termination to a pic-nic party as the escapade of the beautiful Emily, did not, and could not pass away, without causing a prodigious quantity of observation and conjecture. It is likely enough that Lady Otterborne and Janet were the only individuals, among the fourteen of whom the party had consisted, who met and who talked together afterwards without making any allusion whatever to the subject.

The father and mother of the heroine of the adventure were very nearly quarrelling about it. Mr. Steyton did not approve his daughter's conduct at all; but Mrs. Steyton was of opinion that she had done no more than she ought to have done, in order to show that proud puppy, Herbert Otterborne, that she was not so wholly and solely at his command as he appeared to suppose.

"It is all mighty fine to talk of filial respect and duty," said she; "but it is a farce to talk of a man's being in love, if, in a party of pleasure like this, he is to leave his affianced bride by herself, to break her shins over every stump in the forest, while he is parading with my lady, his mother, out of sight and out of sound, happen what might to his lady love."

"Stuff and nonsense, wife," returned the father; "I tell you that Miss Emily has behaved like a flirt and a jilt; and if you had ever treated me so, you would never have been Madam Steyton, with your half-a-dozen thousands per annum, I can tell you."

"It is no good," replied his wife, "for any one to pretend to be in love with Emily, Mr. Steyton, who has any objection to liveliness. Mr. Herbert had better jilt Emily at once, and fall in love with Miss Price, if he wants a doll for a wife instead of a woman. Emily is as beautiful as an angel, and as rich as a princess ; and it is not such a girl as *that*, who is to be left in a wood with her finger in her eye, while her sweetheart is taking care of his mamma ! And as to young Mr. Cornington, he is one of the most perfectly well-behaved young men that I ever met with in the whole course of my life. He would scorn to do what was ungenteel in any way."

"I never heard that it was ungenteel to make love to a pretty girl when there was a good opportunity for it," said the father. "Let him have said or done what he would, my dear, I should not blame him. But I tell you again, your daughter has behaved like a jilt and a flirt."

"And I tell you, Mr. Steyton, that if you go and say so to her, you will learn to repent it, as sure as you are alive," said the mother, warmly ; "I know Emily Steyton thoroughly. She is an angel, if ever there was one on earth ; but she won't bear scolding, either from father or mother, from king or kaiser. You may take my word for that ; and if anything could make such an angel go wrong, it would be just telling her that she did not go right."

At the breakfast-table of the reverend Mr. Price the same subject was discussed, but whatever either of the party might think of the beautiful Emily's capricious manœuvre, they neither of them used such harsh words as jilt and flirt.

Mr. Price observed, with a sort of dignified decorum that became him well, both as a beneficed high churchman and a gentleman of independent fortune, that he did not much like to give an opinion upon such a subject, because he was aware that an opinion from him might be considered as of more importance than that of any other individual ; "And when one is conscious of this," he continued, "it becomes one's duty, as a Christian and a gentleman, to be very cautious. Nevertheless, for the sake of my own daughter, I will not deny that, were I either father or mother to the young lady, I should be very much tempted to lock her up."

"For my part," said Mrs. Price, with aspect and accent of exemplary gentleness, "I so greatly dislike every sort of slander, or censorious severity of any kind, that it would be much more pleasant to me to avoid this painful subject

altogether ; only that I feel myself called upon, as a Smither-ton, and the granddaughter of an English peer, to confess that, if my daughter had behaved in the same style, I should have done all that lay within my reach to prevent her ever having the power of following her own fancies again."

"You speak, as you always do, my dear love, with the most perfect propriety," said her husband ; "but with such a mother," he added, "there can be very little danger that our daughter should ever imitate this imprudent young lady's example."

It was very rarely that any individual of the Price family ever differed from the rest ; but, upon this occasion, the young man ventured to say that he thought Mr. Otterborne was more to blame than Miss Emily. "I am sure I wish she had not done it," added the young man, "as you and mamma both think it was so wrong ; but I must say, I think it was only serving Mr. Herbert right."

This was considered as so very lively a sally by the family party, that they all indulged in rather a hearty laugh ; but after it was over, Miss Louisa said, very affectionately, "Poor dear Emily ! it is very wrong to laugh at her ; for I am sure she never intends to do anything wrong."

"Laugh at her ! Who thought of laughing at *her*, Louisa ?" said the young man. "It is fair enough to laugh at Mr. Herbert, I think. And he ought to remember the vulgar old proverb, 'Many a slip'—you know the rest."

"Yes, William, we know the rest," said his father, with a gentle smile ; "and I am quite ready to confess that proverbs are, as they have been well called, 'the wisdom of nations.' I doubt, indeed, if it is quite judicious in Mr. Otterborne to show himself so very careless a wooer ; for the father's fortune may be lost, as well as the daughter's heart, by it."

"I am sure it would be better that he should lose both, Sir, than that such a girl as Emily Steyton should be married for her money."

"Indeed, I think so too," said Miss Louisa, with a friendly sigh ; "and I wish with all my heart that she was going to be married to some one who really *did* love her."

And hereupon Mr. William Price sighed too, and looked at his sister very affectionately.

But the reader must follow me to the bower of the beautiful Emily before he can learn anything authentic on the state of that young lady's mind.

The first words she uttered, when she found herself shut up *tête-à-tête* with Minny upon retiring for the night, were these—(and they sounded awfully in the handmaiden's ear):—“Minny !” said she ; “Wild horses should not drag me to church to marry that odious and detestable animal, Herbert Otterborne. I hate him like poison !”

Poor Minny's only answer to this was a dismal groan.

“What do you grunt for in that horrid way ?” demanded her lively mistress.

“Because I am now as sure as sure can be, that you will never be married at all, Miss ?” replied the maid.

“Minny ! you are an idiot !” returned Miss Emily.

“No, I am not, Miss,” returned Minny, stoutly. “The lady that does not think Squire Otterborne good enough, never will, and never can, find any one that is.”

“Minny ! you are an idiot, I tell you !” repeated her mistress. “And now, then,” she added, “be good enough to tell me, if you ever had the good luck to get sight of a young gentleman called Mr. Stephen Cornington ?”

“Yes, ma'am, I have had the luck to see him,” returned the girl, turning her head away.

“What are you looking after there, you fool ?” exclaimed her impetuous mistress. “When I choose to condescend to talk to you, I expect that you will condescend to listen to me. Look in my face steadily, Miss Minny, and tell me plainly and distinctly, whether you ever saw any human being, male or female, so beautiful as Stephen Cornington.”

The servant had obeyed the commands of her mistress, and was looking steadily in her face, but she changed colour violently, first, for an instant, looking deadly pale, and then becoming very red.

“What on earth is the matter with the girl ?” exclaimed Emily, looking both puzzled and frightened. “Are you ill, Minny ?”

“I don't believe that I am quite well, ma'am,” she replied ; “for I have had a horrid head-ache all day ; but it is not that which has made my face in a flame, as I feel it is. The reason of my turning so red is that I feel ready to cry, if I dared, at your speaking just as if you really liked another man better than the noble gentleman as you are engaged to.”

“Then you need not blush, nor cry either, any more on that account, Miss Minny, for I no longer hold myself engaged to any mortal man. Herbert Otterborne has proved himself to

be a false-hearted, base betrayer to me, Minny, and after I have told you *that*, you will leave off asking me to marry him, I hope."

"But you would not take any such fancy into your head, if you wasn't in love with somebody else, Miss," said Minny, rather in a faltering voice.

"You are afraid to speak out, you goose!" cried Emily, laughing, "but you need not be so shame-faced, girl! For you have said no more than is true. I *am* in love with somebody else."

"Oh, Miss! it is dangerous work changing so very often! Perhaps your new lover may have a heart as little constant as your own," said Minny.

"Stephen Cornington inconstant, you monster! How do you dare to breathe such a thought in my presence! He adores me, girl! He is positively dying for love of me!"

"I wonder I never heard you say so before, Miss Emily," said the maid, affecting a light laugh; "but I see you are trying to make a fool of me."

"No, my dear good Minny; I certainly should never think of so wasting my time, for you are a fool already," replied Emily, gaily; but her gaiety did not seem infectious, for Minny again turned very pale as she said, "If you will only please to speak seriously to me, Miss Emily, I might not appear to be such a fool as you now seem to think me. For the love of God! tell me, Miss Emily, without any joking at all, do you mean that you are in earnest when you say you are not going to marry Squire Otterborne?"

"Most truly in earnest, my dear Minny," replied Emily, kindly; "and if you are fretting, as I suppose you are, at the idea that all your hopes of seeing your mistress a bride are gone and over, I can comfort your heart with one word: I will be a bride, Minny, never you fear! . . . I will be a bride, and with very little loss of time; and my bridegroom, my beautiful bridegroom, shall be Stephen Cornington!"

The girl—who, either for the reason her mistress had assigned, or for some other, had been apparently a good deal agitated by the conversation—now made a strong effort to recover herself, and so far succeeded as to say, with some appearance of composure, "Well, Miss, of course everybody knows their own business best; but I should have thought Squire Otterborne, who is a baronet born, would have been a

fitter match for you than the other one as you have been pleased to mention."

"Pleased to mention! Yes, girl! I am pleased to mention him—dear, beautiful fellow! We settled it all in the wood, last night, when we pretended to lose our way, and it won't be very long before all the rest of the business will be settled too. I have not quite made up my mind yet as to what I shall say to that magnificent gentleman, Mr. Herbert. I feel as if I were a little afraid of him, Minny; and sometimes I think it would be the best way to let him go on a little further with his impertinent, neglectful ways, so as to give me a fairer excuse for saying outright that I have done with him."

"And that is one of the wisest things that I ever heard you say, Miss Emily," replied Minny. "You just take care to put him in the wrong, and then you will be sure of being right yourself. Don't you be too much in a hurry, Miss; and then I will answer for it that all will be exactly as you wish."

To say the truth, Emily, with all her courage, was greatly comforted by this view of the case from her ready-witted maid Minny; the evident discomfiture with which she had listened to the announcement of this last-discovered change in the state of her affections having rather alarmed her: for as Minny had always been a most indulgent listener upon all former occasions of a like nature, she could not help fearing that what had appeared so monstrous to her might appear monstrous to others also.

But now her courage revived, and she retired to rest with an easy conscience, and a very firm resolution of becoming Mrs. Stephen Cornington with as little delay as possible, or, to speak more correctly, with as little delay as convenient.

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## CHAPTER XXXV

THE mental condition of her maid Minny was very far from being so comfortable; and as this discomfort on her part led to very important results, its rise and progress must be accounted for, which shall be done as briefly as possible.

Mr. Stephen Cornington was a very handsome man, but, like

Captain Smith, of immortal memory, he was also a gay deceiver. It may also be observed, that young as he looked, he was a year or two older than he had stated himself to be when he presented himself to his newly-found grandfather. Moreover, Mr. Stephen Cornington, having been partly educated in Paris, and partly in Barbadoes, had never, at any period of his life, been what is called a backward youth, and his successes among the fair and fragile of the softer sex had not commenced at Weldon.

He had come to that rural abode at the instigation of his respectable progenitress, Madame Briot, who, having very accurately informed herself of the present position in life of her early lover, had deemed it a good speculation to send the youth to claim kindred and seek fortune in a quarter where it would be so difficult to deny his *natural* claim to both.

This expedition was undertaken by him with right good-will, for it promised novelty and amusement, and might lead to many more solid advantages still.

Everything, as we have seen, prospered with him marvellously. He was, indeed, fully aware that he had failed in his attempts to convince Mrs. Mathews that he was all that her husband believed him to be ; and he was aware, too, that Janet Anderson was not in love with him ; but in neither case did his failure greatly distress him.

A doting grandfather was a much more important personage than a doting grandfather's wife ; and Janet Anderson, thank Heaven ! was not the only pretty girl to be found in Weldon.

His intention had certainly been to captivate the whole family, and also the whole neighbourhood likewise ; and his success had been such as might well satisfy any reasonable young man, and in fact it did pretty well satisfy him.

His philosophical resignation under his failure with Janet, whom he had certainly thought very decidedly pretty when he first looked at her beneath the elm-tree, must not, however, be received as a proof of his philosophy on such subjects in general ; for Mr. Stephen Cornington was exceedingly addicted to falling in love, and the majority of the fair sex with whom he had hitherto made acquaintance through life had been very much addicted to falling in love with him in return.

But his first emotion of admiration, in the case of Janet, had been suddenly quenched by a very spiteful feeling of resentment. He had never forgiven her, and probably never would forgive her, for not having accepted the lie which he had so obligingly

invented for her use, to save her from the awkwardness of confessing that she had been taking a *tête-à-tête* walk with a young gentleman before the rest of the family had left their bed-rooms. But he was not in despair because Janet Anderson did not answer his expectations, and he very speedily made acquaintance with more than one who did.

It so chanced, that upon one fine Sunday afternoon he had been parading with his grandfather along a path which was the favourite holiday promenade of the village, expressly for the purpose of looking at all the pretty girls; and it so chanced, also, that by far the prettiest amongst them did Mr. Stephen Cornington the favour of staring at him very nearly in the same flattering manner in which he stared at her; and he had, moreover, the satisfaction of perceiving that this was repeated every time they passed each other, which was not seldom, for the space allotted by fashion to the promenade was not very long, and their walk that afternoon was not very short.

Mr. Mathews was so indulgent a grandfather, that he might have been very safely questioned as to the name of the pretty creature who had thus amiably attracted his attention; but Stephen Cornington was too good a Roman Catholic to make any unnecessary confessions, and he, therefore, said nothing about her till he had fairly tired out the old gentleman, and then, upon the proposal being made that they should go home and see if tea was not ready, he asked, coaxingly, for leave to stay behind, for the sake of having another turn or two—it was so very pleasant!

This permission was very readily granted; and within five minutes after the old man's back was turned, the young one had contrived to learn that the fair object of his admiring curiosity was Miss Jemima Stokes, the eldest daughter of William Stokes, the carpenter, and the personal attendant of Miss Emily Steyton, of "The Lodge."

This was all the information necessary, as a preliminary to his making her acquaintance, and he lost neither time nor opportunity in making and in improving it. In short, the poor girl fell most desperately in love with him, while her mistress was still too violently in love with Herbert Otterborne to permit her paying any particular attention to the frequent absences of her maid, who, by her own account, spent many more hours than usual at her father's cottage, because "mother was poorly."

But although pretty Minny Stokes was imprudent enough to

let a gentleman fall in love with her, and, worse still, to fall in love with him in return, she was by no means so silly as her gentleman-lover supposed her to be.

Of course, upon this occasion, as upon all others of the same kind, the gentleman made no scruple of promising everything that the young lady asked him to promise, and nothing less than a promise of marriage could satisfy the conscience of the fair Jemima.

The promise, therefore, was given, but not so given as greatly to endanger the liberty of the giver ; for it was spoken, not written ; and the only witness to it was Minny's little brother, who, young as he looked, seemed younger still in intellect than in age. But this promise, such as it was, was all she could obtain ; for he declared that he was bound by a vow never to give any promise in writing ; yet nevertheless he succeeded in persuading her that this was sufficient. There was, of course, no difficulty in making her perceive that as the young man was wholly dependent on his grandfather, it would be madness to run the risk of displeasing him by a premature disclosure of their engagement. Poor Minny's prudence, however, went no further, but altogether forsook her at that point.

Such being the state of her own affairs when her young mistress disclosed to her the firm resolution which she had formed of becoming Mr. Stephen Cornington's wife herself, it may easily be supposed that poor Minny could not listen to it unmoved ; and therefore it was, that upon receiving her young lady's gay good night, joined to an assurance, as she nestled her beautiful head upon her pillow, that she was going to sleep on purpose to dream of her darling Cornington, the unhappy Minny retired to her own chamber in a state of mind considerably less comfortable than that in which she had left her mistress and her rival.

The thing which is the most likely to happen on all such occasions happened now. Minny Stokes sat down and cried heartily. But she was not naturally of a desponding temper ; and this first burst of passionate emotion over, she began with a good deal of resolute courage to examine her own position, and to take measure, as it were, of her own hopes and fears.

That Stephen Cornington was in love with her, and not with her mistress, was a conclusion that she came to without any difficulty at all, as it is probable most other girls would have done to whom Stephen had made love as much and as skilfully as he had done to her.

This, of course, was the great foundation of her hopes.

Her fears rested on the notorious fact of Emily's great wealth, for which she had a notion—though they had never discussed the subject—that her lover might possibly feel some little inclination. This idea was very dreadful ; and though she had wiped her eyes, and washed them, too, in order that she might consider what she had to do with the more composure, the tears burst forth again as she considered the tremendous contrast which existed between herself and her mistress in this respect.

But again she wiped them, for again both hope and memory whispered to her heart that she was beloved.

And then she called to mind, with equal satisfaction and thankfulness, all the absurdities which her rival had already committed on the subject of love.

She recalled, with unspeakable delight, the vehemence of her respective passions for the young lord and the young shopman, and rehearsed in her faithful memory, all the vehement effusions of passionate love which she had heard her pour forth respecting the young squire of the Manor-house, till smiles, and almost laughter, chased her tears.

"There is no great harm done yet," thought she ; "the harm and the danger will only come after she shall have succeeded in making Herbert Otterborne declare that he will not marry her. Then, indeed, if she turns to Stephen Cornington for consolation, she may find it, if there is not more faith in him than folks say is ever to be found in mortal man. God is my witness, that I am not afraid of her beauty ! Stephen loves me too well for there to be any danger from that. But I am afraid of her riches ! When one thinks of the hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands of golden sovereigns that they say old Steyton has scraped together for her, how can it be hoped that mortal man will say he won't have it, if it is offered to him ?"

And as this dreadful thought oppressed her, she wept again !

After passing a very miserable night, poor girl, she at length came to the reasonable conclusion that her best, and perhaps her only chance, was in delay. She had already touched this theme with some success when talking to her mistress before they parted ; and on this theme she resolved to expatiate again, pointing out the comparative safety and the assured success of her purpose, provided only that she would not expose her own caprice and inconstancy by being in a hurry to dismiss an accepted lover, who was moreover a gentleman of so much

consequence in the county, till something a little like a reasonable complaint could be urged against him.

It was upon this hope that she went to sleep at last, and it was this hope that gave her courage to answer her young lady's bell the next morning, though certain of hearing that the man whom she looked upon as her own husband was the devoted lover of another.

She found Emily pretty nearly as she had left her, that is to say, in the highest possible spirits ; confident in the success of all her wishes, and very little disposed to hear of any difficulties, or even of any delays.

Again and again did the unhappy Minny suggest to her the absolute necessity of prudence in the management of an affair so difficult.

"Difficult!" exclaimed Emily, laughing. "I dare say it would be very difficult to you, and it might be very difficult to little Miss Price, and very difficult to that pretty pale face, Miss Janet ; but I tell you, Minny, that it is quite impossible anything should be difficult to me!"

Nevertheless, the desperate earnestness of Minny, as, again and again, she represented the indignation of Sir Charles, the disappointment of Mr. and Mrs. Steyton, and the consternation of the whole neighbourhood, if one man were to be thus changed for another, without her having any reason save her own whim to assign for it, at length induced the headstrong heiress so far to give way as to promise that she would take a little time, in order to get up a little quarrel with Herbert. "I shall not find it very difficult, I daresay ; for his cold ways are so provoking, that I need do nothing but just show them off before papa a little, and he will be as ready to get rid of him as I am. And then, if anybody makes any difficulty whatever about my marrying Cornington, I'll run off with him. You shall see if I won't."

The extremely unhappy Jemima Stokes felt very much inclined to throw herself at full length upon the floor, and die there outright, if possible. But, before she yielded herself to this weakness, she fortunately bethought her that it was a great deal more likely that she should live than die, even if she did throw herself upon the ground, and this little glimpse of common sense was very useful to her.

Miss Emily Steyton was very fond of Cologne-water ; and sundry pretty bottles, containing that refreshing mixture, were to be found on sundry tables. To one of these Minny applied

herself, while her young mistress was engaged in winding up her jewelled watch. A liberal handful of this panacea, rubbed without ceremony over her pale face, was of infinite service to her, and she contrived to say, in a sort of subdued tone that seemed to justify, or rather to explain, the respectful silence which followed :

"Of course, Miss, you know best."

"Of course, I suppose I do," was Emily's reply, as she received her gloves and pocket-handkerchief from the hands of her attendant ; and in a moment afterwards the miserable girl had the relief of finding herself alone.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

But Jemima Stokes had not yet played her last card, and she was not one who would give up the game till she had done so. She knew herself to be at liberty for an hour or two, and she had already determined that this interval should not be spent in bemoaning her misfortunes.

The great object to be obtained in the first instance, was the delay of Emily's final rejection of Herbert Otterborne ; and she thought she saw her way pretty clearly towards this. Perhaps there was no one in the parish, except Sir Charles Otterborne himself and his steward, so thoroughly well-acquainted with the actual state of his finances, as Miss Jemima Stokes.

In a considerable degree she had acquired this information, with the rest of the household, from the ceaseless gossip in the servants' hall respecting the doubtful eligibility of Miss Emily's approaching marriage with the young squire of the Manor-house ; and Sir Charles might have been a good deal surprised, perhaps, could he have heard the extremely well-informed style in which his most private concerns were there discussed.

But Minny had, moreover, a private source of information on the subject, which was more important to her, at the present moment, than all the sagacious commentaries of her fellow-servants, for her father was one of Sir Charles Otterborne's creditors, and by no means an inconsiderable one among his

tradespeople, although some of his friends among the monied tribes of Israel might have sneered at the small amount of John Stokes, the carpenter's, claims.

But everything is comparative, and the effects produced by comparison are greatly dependent on the *juxta-position* of the objects to be compared. Now, Minny was almost in the daily habit of hearing her father utter the very strongest protestations, that no earthly power should prevent his arresting Sir Charles Otterborne, if the young gentleman's marriage did not take place before Christmas.

"It is easy enough," said the carpenter, "for them as he loses his money to, at cards and dice, to take his bits of paper, and wait till they turn into bank-notes, because they none of 'em have made no outlay of ready cash as I have done; but if Sir Charles and those afore him had reigned over us for thousands of years, instead of hundreds, I wouldn't keep his park palings up for nothing."

Such was the harangue to which Minny had listened very recently at the house of her father, and she resolved to turn what she had heard there to good account.

For this purpose she immediately sought her father, and having led him to a very retired bower which had been more than once the scene of her secret meetings with Cornington, she told him that she was very uneasy in her mind about her young lady's marriage.

"What do you mean, girl?" returned the carpenter, sharply.  
"Do'st mean that there is any danger of its going off?"

"It will be Mr. Herbert's fault if it does, father," she replied.  
"And when one thiuk's what a deal of good would be done in the parish, and in the town, too, father, by all those thousands of pounds which the Otterbornes are to receive on the wedding-day, it is a sad pity that it should be stopped just because Mr. Herbert thinks himself so sure of the prize, that he won't take the trouble of fixing the day."

"If he won't fix his day, I'll fix mine," returned her father, becoming extremely red in the face. "Sir Charles owes me three hundred and ninety-seven pounds, fifteen, and ninepence; for it was no longer ago than last night that I cast up the whole account, and a good portion of that sum I have taken out of the savings'-bank, and paid down in ready money for timber; and if Master Herbert thinks he may play fast and loose, for his own amusement, and keeps me waiting for my cash, he is mistaken."

"Of course he is, father," replied Minny, in a tone of sympathy; "and yet it is no good to expect that you'll get your money by getting Sir Charles into prison. At any rate, you must wait till the furniture and the plate and all the rest of it is sold. And that must take time, you know; whereas the marriage might be done at once, if you will but set the right way to work about it."

"And what do you call the right way, girl?" returned her father; "I don't know what you are after."

"Then I'll tell you, father. This is what I am after. I want you to call upon Sir Charles, and give him a good fright by telling him that you will wait no longer," said Minny.

"And much good that is likely to do, isn't it?" he replied. "How many times do you think I have told him that already?"

"But when you told him so before, he hadn't got such a way out of the scrape as is in his hands now, father," said the girl.

"And how do we know it's in his hands? How do we know that his son will be ready at a minute's warning? Maybe, as he thinks the prize sure, he'd like to keep his liberty a bit longer," replied the father.

"No; that's not it, father. He's got no such idle thoughts in him," said Minny, gravely "'Tis my young lady that is skittish, not Mr. Herbert. But Mr. Herbert may be a little too slow for her fancy," she added; "and though he isn't a bit likely to go from his word, she might go from hers, and nothing so likely to make her as the notion that her lover felt sure of her."

"As to all that, I know nothing, girl," he replied; "and, what is more still, I don't care nothing. Sir Charles must find some way or another for paying my bill, or I will find some way or another for putting him within stone walls."

"But won't you warn him once more before you do it, father?" said Minny, earnestly.

"I'll be hanged, if I do," was the stout reply. "My warnings have not been wanting, I promise you; and I'll not leave my bench again to trudge up to the Manor-house for the honour and glory of being told that I might go into the hall, and drink his health."

And this was the only answer she could obtain, leaving her with the terrible conviction that she had only been hastening the termination of the engagement between young Otterborne and her mistress; the very natural idea suggesting itself, as

she turned from her father's cottage, that the actual arrest of Sir Charles would be the most effectual means of preventing the marriage.

For a few minutes the unhappy girl yielded herself up to a frightful feeling of despair, and had her temperament been a little less sanguine, it is likely that the possibility of drowning all her sorrows in the mill-dam would have occurred to her; but, as it was, she thought of something else.

Among all the other family facts respecting the race of Otterborne, which were repeated and commented upon in the servants' hall of Mr. Steyton, the young man's very devoted attachment for his mother was not forgotten.

"He wouldn't never be living here, doing nothing," said one, "if it was not for his mother."

"He is as proud as he is gentle," said the housekeeper, whose niece was "own maid" to Lady Otterborne.

"But I don't see how his pride should prevent his living in his own father's house," said the cook.

"The pride I mean is proper pride," returned the very respectable head of the Steyton female household. "If it was not that he won't leave his mother, he might be in some profession himself, which would prevent his looking for everything to his scamp of a father."

"Well, now," said a footman, who had been born and bred at Weldon, "I should think Master Herbert would scorn to go into any sort of business for the sake of making money."

"It is I that ought to know the most of the Manor-house," said another; "seeing as I lived three years as page to my lady, before I came to be second footman here, and it is our housekeeper as is right, I can tell you. Master Herbert would put his hand in the fire any time to save my lady, either from trouble or pain. And it is to watch over her that he stays at home, and for nothing else."

Conversation such as this, or something very like it, had been often repeated in the hearing of Minny, and it now occurred to her that if she could herself see Herbert, she might give him such a hint respecting the danger which threatened the peace of the Manor-house as might induce him to claim the promised hand of Emily in a manner that would make her marrying another much more difficult than it appeared at present.

Scarcely had this bold thought suggested itself than it was acted upon, and she instantly turned her steps towards the Manor-house. Had she been less agitated and less excited, she

might have shrunk from such an interview as she was now determined to seek. But her object was too immensely important to herself, and every nerve was too tightly strung, to permit any minor considerations to check this last desperate attempt to save herself from destruction.

She was too well known by every servant at the Manor-house for her difficulties to be increased by any obstacles in the way of her immediately seeing Mr. Otterborne. There might, perhaps, have been a few jokes respecting the nature of her errand, and as to whether she had brought a letter or only a message from her young lady; but as no one doubted that she was an authorised messenger between the lovers, her *entrée* to the library, where Herbert was sitting, was rendered perfectly easy.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," were her first words; but she looked so pale and so much agitated as she uttered them, that the young man immediately felt assured that she had some painful tidings to communicate, and he exclaimed, with some impatience,—

"What is the matter, Jemima? I beg you will tell me immediately."

This was a great assistance to her, for she no longer felt any difficulty as to the manner in which she should communicate what she wanted to tell.

"I will, I will, Sir," she replied; "I will tell you everything, and I must trust to your goodness that you will not blame me for what I cannot help. I have just come from father's, Mr. Herbert; and he told me what it almost broke my heart to hear, both for your sake and my young lady's."

And here Minny put her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

"Pray tell me what you have got to say!" said Herbert; "there is no danger that I should blame you, Minny."

"Then may I tell you outright," said Minny, "just everything that passed, without your thinking that I make too free?"

"You may, indeed, and very safely. I only beg you not to delay, for I am busy," he replied.

"Then this is it, Sir," returned the girl. "I went down to father's this morning, as soon as my young lady was dressed, to see after mother, who had been poorly, and, as it happened, I found father all alone, for mother and Dick was gone out. Father was very busy with his accounts; and at first he seemed as if he had no mind to talk to me, because he was too busy; but then he changed his mind, and told me to sit down,

'cause he had got a question to ask me, and the question was, Mr. Herbert, whether I thought as you really meant to marry my young lady."

Herbert Otterborne started on hearing these words, and coloured violently.

"I have no intention of speaking severely to you, Minny," said he; "but I must say that I think it would be as well if your father spared himself the trouble of attending to my concerns and minded his own."

"Oh, Sir! he do mind his own," said the girl; "and that only too well, Mr. Herbert; and that's what it is as brings me to you here now."

"Go on," said Herbert.

"I answered, Sir, as I thought in duty bound, that, in course you was going to be married to Miss Emily; and then I said to him, 'And what is it as makes you think about that, father?' And now, Mr. Herbert, you must please to forgive me when I tell you his answer—which was too rude for him to speak, or for me to tell—only I know it's my duty: 'Because,' said he, 'if your young lady don't marry the son, I'll put the father in prison for my bill;'"

And here she stopped, and clasping her hands beseechingly together, looked in his face as if imploring him to avert so dreadful a calamity.

For a moment Herbert was profoundly silent, and appeared as much dismayed at her intelligence as she could either have hoped or wished.

At length he said:

"It is impossible for me to doubt, Minny, that you have meant well in giving me this information. Of your father's conduct I will say nothing."

"I am as angry at father as you can be, Mr. Herbert," said she, interrupting him; "but yet it is but truth to say, that his patience, poor man, has been sore tried. He has been a hard-working man, Mr. Herbert; and a deal of the money that is owing to him by Sir Charles was what he had earned by his labour years ago, and put into the savings-bank, and then took it out again to pay for the timber that was wanted for Sir Charles's work: so he is a good deal to be pitied, Mr. Herbert, though he is now behaving so bad."

"And I am behaving worse in being angry with him," said poor Herbert, looking completely subdued; and then, after struggling with himself for a moment, as if hating to enter

upon such a theme, he added : "But, of course, Minny, when your father asked this question you answered in the affirmative?"

"Answered what, Mr. Herbert?" said Minny, doubtfully.

"I mean, that of course you answered, 'Yes,'" returned Herbert.

These words fell upon the heart of Minny like oil upon troubled water. She did not, however, betray any of the delight they gave her ; but replied, in rather a piteous tone : "Why, yes, Mr. Herbert, I did say so ; but, indeed, Sir, I doubt if my poor dear young lady would have had the courage to say the same, if the question had been asked at her."

And here Minny again applied her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

Herbert Otterborne coloured like a crimson peony ; but, nevertheless, he replied in a voice of very tolerable composure : "Why so, Minny? Why should not your young lady answer as you did?"

"It is very hard to be obliged to speak out so very plain, Mr. Herbert, when it would never be my wish to say anything but what was civil ; but my duty won't let me hide the truth—and the truth is, Mr. Herbert, that my poor dear young lady thinks that you seem inclined to neglect her."

Again the face of poor Herbert tingled ; but his resolution was immediately taken. "Your young lady wrongs me," said he ; "but I am now going to the 'Lodge,' and I hope I shall succeed in making her understand me better."

The eyes of the successful Minny sparkled with revived hope and happiness ; and Herbert, as he saw the effect his words had produced, not only gave her credit for a vastly more disinterested feeling than any of which her nature was capable, but drew a second inference as fallacious as the first : "This poor foolish Emily, then, really loves me," thought he, "and the only return I make is ingratitude and negligence ! This must not, and shall not be!"

Minny made an humble courtesy and departed ; but there was little of humility at her heart, for she felt that never had a difficult task been more ably executed.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEVER had Herbert, from the hour when he first determined upon his own self-sacrifice, sought the presence of the lady who had so unexpectedly bestowed her affections upon him with feelings so nearly approaching gratitude as he did now.

He was, as usual, shown into the full-dressed drawing-room, where all visitors were received, and, as usual, he found it empty. Whether he would have thought most of his mother, or most of Janet, had he known at that moment how very nearly Miss Emily had decided upon sending down word by the servant who announced him, that she did not want to see him, and that he need not trouble himself to call again—how he might have felt, had he known this, may be doubtful. But he did not know it; and, therefore, stood looking out of the window upon the flower beds with very tolerable composure, while the fair mistress of his destiny was standing before her glass, debating the question—To see or not to see him?

She was not only standing before her glass, but she was looking into it, and this circumstance probably decided the question in favour of her granting the interview that had been asked for. For Emily was most decidedly looking beautiful; and so very great was her delight upon all occasions in showing off this radiant beauty, that she could not resist the pleasure of doing it now.

“The wretch!” she muttered, as she smiled at herself for the gratification of seeing her own beautiful teeth; “it would serve him right to make him more in love with me than he has ever been yet, just on purpose to make him the more miserable when he finds that he has lost me for ever!” And in this frame of mind she went down-stairs and presented herself to him, “looking beautiful with all her might.”

Poor Herbert had the full consciousness of deserving the rebuke which had so indirectly reached him, and this consciousness gave to his manner a little of the earnestness and the softness which had assuredly often been wanting in his style of addressing her; and had he, in the Stephen-Cornington vein, thrown his arms audaciously round her, and declared that he was come to seal his pardon on her lips, the chances would

have been very greatly in favour of her committing a new infidelity, and swearing to him that the only man she loved in the world was himself.

But although Mr. Otterborne did not put the reality of her passion for Stephen to this dangerous test, he produced an effect that ought to have completely satisfied Minny, for it was precisely that which it had been her special purpose to achieve.

All that Minny believed to be necessary for the success of her own hopes, was *time*; and the process by which she felt sure of gaining it, was exactly that which was going on now between her young lady and her still affianced lover.

"If," thought she, "I can but make her afraid, and ashamed to throw him off, she won't be in such a red-hot hurry to do it."

It was thus that the waiting-maid had reasoned; and that her conclusion was correct, was now fully proved by the impossibility which Emily felt of giving the graceful, dignified, and confiding Herbert Otterborne any immediate reason to suspect that she intended to jilt him.

Nor did he suspect it the least in the world; and after a visit of very nearly three quarters of an hour long, he left her with a parting shake of the hand considerably more affectionate than usual, and returned home with the satisfactory conviction that if there had been anything wrong, he had succeeded in making it right again, and that there was no longer any danger of arrest from the carpenter, if the certainty of his marriage with the heiress could prevent it.

Emily Steyton was a young lady who very rarely felt any doubts or any fears about anything. Her own will, her own wishes, and her own whims, were the only laws that she acknowledged, and on most points she was as resolute as she was wilful. But there had been something in the look and manner of Herbert during this visit which had excited both her admiration and respect, and if the thoughts which occupied her immediately after his departure had been expressed in words, her soliloquy might have run thus,—

"At any rate, he is the grandest looking fellow I ever saw. He looks as if he were born to be a king. About beauty, I hardly know which is the handsomest. They are both lovely! But that is not the worst part of the business, for I suppose if I saw them together for a few more times, I should be able to find out, for good and all, which of the two I really did like best, so that's not the great difficulty. The great difficulty is, that, at this very identical moment, I am

positively engaged to both of them. There is nobody that knows this, however, but my own self, that is one good thing,—except Minny, indeed. But I don't mind her. Of course she counts for nobody."

These thoughts were followed by others, some of which were certainly rather embarrassing. The riot her father would make; the storm her mother would blow up; the wrath of all the Otterborne family; and the gossip of the whole neighbourhood; in case she really did decide upon jilting Herbert,—all passed before her in very alarming review.

And when she turned her thoughts upon the great risk which she should certainly run of not being married at all, for Heaven knows how long, if she did not make up her mind at once, she clasped her hands together in an agony which appeared very greatly to resemble despair, and exclaimed, in heart-rending soliloquy:

"I shall go mad! I am quite sure I shall, if I can't settle it in one way or the other at once!" And then, after the silent meditation of a few more minutes, she added; "Well, then! I do think at this moment that of the two I would rather marry Herbert Otterborne. Besides, what a horrid deal of trouble it would save! Everything is getting ready for that, and nothing is getting ready for the other. I may not be married for these six months to come, for anything I know. And Louisa Price's bonnet ordered and everything."

After this passionate outbreak the beautiful Emily fell into a silent reverie—her elbows resting on the table, and her fair head supported by her fair hands—and so we must leave her for the present; for the position into which she had brought herself was certainly rather a difficult one, and it might be tedious to follow her through all the meanderings which her fancy suggested for escaping from it.

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Mrs. Mathews, after her conversation with Mr. Cuthbridge, felt her dislike to her husband's grandson very considerably increased. She might have found it difficult, perhaps, to have assigned any very satisfactory reason for this, but so it was. The confirmation, too, of her suspicion that the young man, notwithstanding his eager declarations that he wished for employment, had no such wish at all, caused her to turn her thoughts painfully to the probability that this somewhat mysterious, and, to her feelings at least, extremely unprepossessing young man, was likely to be the companion of herself and her

Janet, for an indefinite, and probably a long period. She confessed to herself that he was extremely well-looking, and possessed of many showy, if not positively brilliant, accomplishments ; and this, together with his youth, and the fact that she had never seen him otherwise than civil to everybody, gave her a disagreeable sort of consciousness that she was harsh and unjust towards him.

"Is it," thought she, "because I am so jealous of my Janet's dignity, that I dislike the idea of this long domestic companionship for her, so very greatly ? Or is it that I feel there is a mystery about him and his past life which prevents my feeling anything like trust in him ?"

And then she not unfrequently thought of her own settlement, which, at her own earnest request, had been so arranged as to give every farthing of her father's long-descended property to this ill-descended youth ; and in the lofty solitude of her own den, she might now and then have been heard to groan as she thought of it.

True it was, and she certainly found great consolation in remembering it—true it was that this arrangement, lamentable as it was for the future, gave her a great deal of very consolatory power for the present.

Notwithstanding all her wisdom, there was certainly a good deal of folly in the ceaseless care she took to hide from every human being the painful fact of Janet's penniless condition. She carried this so far as even to delude the poor girl herself by telling her that she had received very satisfactory information respecting the probable result of the mercantile transaction which had involved her father in difficulty ; but that it was a subject which ought not to be discussed, even between themselves, till the final result was absolutely ascertained, and that, in the meantime, she (Mrs. Mathews) was authorised to make such pecuniary advances to Janet as she thought proper.

Had no such personage as Stephen Cornington ever been brought upon the scene, Mrs. Mathews would never have told so many fibs ; and had Janet Anderson been a few years older, not even Mrs. Mathews herself would have persuaded her to accept advances which she might never be able to repay.

Nor was poor Mrs. Mathews perfectly satisfied herself with the part she was acting ; but a feeling, stronger than herself, seemed to render her absolutely incapable of enduring the seeing the illegitimate offspring of her husband strutting in the assured independence that her own inheritance would give him, while

the child of John Anderson was held up to the pity of the whole neighbourhood as an object of charity.

But the spirit of Mrs. Mathews was not one easily to be cast down ; and as she looked in the sweet face of her adopted daughter, she consoled herself very pleasantly with the belief that she should live long enough to see her Janet married, as well as long enough to save her a fortune from her private five hundred per annum.

But neither the presence of Stephen Cornington, nor the poverty of Janet Anderson, weighed heavily enough upon her vigorous mind to greatly occupy her thoughts or depress her spirits. There was another subject which, though it might be supposed to touch her less nearly, seemed to occupy her more. This was the approaching marriage of Herbert Otterborne and Emily Steyton.

It was not that she had detected the young lady's volatile inconstancy, or that she suspected her of being in any way worse than silly and unladylike ; but that Herbert should be sold to save his father from being arrested—which was an idea pretty widely circulated—was dreadful !

In her secret heart she wondered, greatly wondered, that he had escaped the additional misery of falling in love with her Janet, but she was grateful for it ; for had it been otherwise, and even if there had been no rich Emily Steyton in the case, how terrible an addition to his wretched mother's sorrows it would have been, had she seen his noble heart torn by a hopeless attachment to a penniless girl. Yes, Mrs. Mathews wondered at his insensibility, but she was thankful that it was so.

That she did not deceive herself on this point was made evident to her by the conduct of Lady Otterborne ; for it was perfectly certain that such a woman, and such a mother, would have been tremblingly alive to the danger of exposing Herbert to attractions which there were so many reasons for thinking would be very full of peril to him. For how was it possible to avoid seeing that Janet was as exactly the sort of creature he was likely to love, as that Emily was exactly the sort of creature he was likely not to love ? Yet Lady Otterborne persisted most perseveringly in coaxing Janet to come to her, and in coaxing Mrs. Mathews to permit it.

The inference, therefore, clearly was, that lovely as she thought her Janet, Herbert Otterborne thought his magnificent Emily more lovely still ; till at length she brought herself to indulge in a little quizzing smile at her own partiality, which

made it so very difficult for her to believe that any beauty in the world could equal in attraction the beauty of John Anderson's daughter.

Neither did all her watchfulness enable her to discern any very serious cause for alarm on account of the gentle Janet herself. She might still occasionally be seen with an open book in her hand, without displaying to the spectator any very certain evidence that she was reading it ; but as she appeared in all other respects to be in a very happy and healthful state, both of mind and body, her adopted and most doting mother laughed away all her own fears of the miseries of a hopeless attachment with which she had certainly begun to torment herself with more of romance than was at all befitting the wisdom of Mrs. Mathews of "The den."

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THINGS had gone on in this manner, apparently in a state of great tranquillity, for several days. Minny had contrived to pacify her father, Stephen Cornington had contrived to pacify her, and Emily had contrived to pacify Stephen Cornington, not by anything she had said to him, but by contriving to keep out of his way, having accompanied her portly papa and mamma upon a visit of some duration to a family at a distance, who did not enjoy the honour of Mr. Cornington's acquaintance. Things went on for several days in this manner, but they could not go on so for ever. However well inclined Miss Emily Steyton might be to forget her moonlight walk in the woods of Knightly, Mr. Stephen Cornington had not forgotten, nor did he intend to forget, any single circumstance connected with the said walk, or any single word uttered by the beautiful Emily in the course of it.

The young lady had confessed to him, before their *tête-à-tête* ramble had lasted more than ten minutes, that she was tired to death of Herbert Otterborne ; and about ten minutes before it ended, she pledged her word to him that she would play the said Herbert a trick worth two of his, when he handed about

his lady-mother, instead of handing her, for that she would marry him, the said Stephen Cornington, instead.

And never since love and marriage were invented, could any gentleman have been found more desperately purposed to fulfil the promise he had given in return, than was Mr. Stephen Cornington.

He bore the absence of his affianced love with very tolerable patience for about a week, and he bore it the better, perhaps, because his other affianced love, the pretty Minny, had accompanied her mistress on her visit.

But at length Sunday arrived, and Miss Emily appeared at church, and Miss Minny appeared at church also ; and then it was that Mr. Mathews' magnificent grandson determined to bring matters to a very speedy conclusion. He had already fully made up his mind as to the manner in which this conclusion was to be brought about ; and he had gone further still, for he had already so well arranged his affairs as to be perfectly well prepared for an elopement, even if his beautiful Emily's privy purse proved as empty as his own had been, before he had explained the nature of his position to his delighted grandfather.

It would really be scarcely saying more than the truth, if I averred that the old gentleman was quite as much delighted with the scheme as the young one. Every feeling left alive within him appeared gratified to the greatest possible extent.

The glory of seeing his matchless grandson seize upon the golden prize that the haughty Otterbornes had sought to gain, and carry it off, despite the well-known stigma on his birth, was a species of triumph to which he was most keenly sensible ; and it was with a feeling little short of rapture that he gave him a cheque upon the Hertford Bank for one hundred pounds, which, as they were already, as he facetiously observed, on the north road, would, he hoped, be sufficient to pay their travelling expenses to Gretna Green and back again.

So far everything seemed to smile most propitiously on the hopes and fortunes of the young West Indian, but malignant Fate sat by, smiling, in the form of pretty Minny Stokes.

The church at Weldon has a handsome and an ample porch ; so ample as to permit persons of low degree to linger within its shade, while persons of high degree pass through it in dignified procession, as they leave the sacred edifice. Among the latter was the magnificent Stephen Cornington ; among the former, the humble Minny Stokes.

Minny had been the first to quit the pew appropriated to the use of the Weldon Lodge domestics, but the last to linger in the porch ; for it was not till nearly all the congregation had passed through it, that the bright curls of her faithless lover were seen waving above the tall hats of the rest.

Stephen Cornington had, in fact, lingered behind his party for the purpose of whispering in the ear of Emily, his assurance that he should be at the "Lodge" within an hour. But the beautiful Emily was not just then in a humour to be so whispered to ; and, therefore, when she was about half way down the church, she gave one of her own peculiarly lively twirls back again towards the vestry door, through which the Price family always made their exit—having, as she declared, something very particular indeed to say to her friend Louisa.

What her whisperings to her friend might have been, it boots not here to tell, probably nothing very important ; but the whisper of her maid to the stately stepping Stephen, intimated that he must contrive to meet her in a well-known lane within half-an-hour, or he would be after getting himself into terrible trouble.

Either by hit or wit, Minny had struck upon the right chord, for she frightened him ; and, to say the truth, Stephen Cornington, notwithstanding his six feet two inches, was not a brave man, but, on the contrary, rather the reverse. Her whisper was a very skilful one, for he heard it though nobody else did, and he was very obediently walking in the lane specified when Minny got there.

" You are out in your reckoning, you false-hearted villain !" were the words with which she greeted him ; in reply to which he attempted to kiss her,—asked her what she had got in her head, and told her not to talk nonsense.

Her reproaches, and his denials, went on for some time with very little effect on either side, till at length he changed his tone, and told her very solemnly that if she would listen to him like a reasonable woman, he would make her understand his real situation, and that then they might consult together as to what was best to be done,

This seemed at once to act as a sedative, for he now, for the first time, offered to do precisely the thing which, from the very earliest commencement of their acquaintance, she had the most earnestly desired that he should do. Jemima Stokes was very much in love with the handsome Barbadian, but nevertheless she was an observant and sharp-witted girl, and was by no

means slow in discovering that, let Mr. Stephen Cornington be as great a favourite with his grandpapa as it was possible for a grandson to be, there was still something very odd in one's never having heard of him before.

Of course no mention had been made of his illegitimacy by any member of the Weldon Grange family, but it was probable that Minny Stokes was not the only individual in the parish who might have thought it odd that he had never been mentioned at all till he came to announce himself.

On the whole, however, no one seemed to care very much about it ; Mr. Mathews had introduced him as his grandson, and this had proved quite sufficient to procure him admission to every house in the neighbourhood.

But with Minny the case was different, and this promise of being informed of all the particulars of his "real situation," had the effect of making her refrain from uttering any more of the bitter reproaches with which she came armed to assail him.

How much there might have been of his bygone private history, with which he did not think it necessary to trouble her, we have no means of knowing, but he told her quite enough to make her clearly understand that if he would even be so obliging as immediately to marry her publicly, instead of privately, the marriage would not be a particularly advantageous one, for he very frankly informed her that he did not possess a single shilling in the world.

This very naturally made the most satisfactory argument in his defence, when she accused him of inconstancy.

"My plan, my darling Minny," said he, "is to marry your young lady, to receive the fortune, which is to be paid down in ready money on the wedding-day, and then to set off with you, dearest, in a postchaise and four for London, where we will stay till we are both of us tired of seeing sights, and then I will carry you home as my own dear wife, to my own beautiful country beyond the seas."

The part assigned to her young lady in this plan appeared to have so small a portion of love in it, that the jealousy of Minny seemed to die a natural death as she listened to it ; but this tender confidence on her part by no means atoned, in the opinion of Mr. Stephen, for the very disagreeable assurance which accompanied it, that Miss Emily seemed to be getting fonder again of Mr. Herbert than she had ever been in her life.

"She met him twice at dinner at different houses, while we was away ; and she has gone on talking of her marriage with him ever since," said Minny, coaxingly, playing with her lover's curls as she spoke.

But dreadfully was the wretched girl startled when he broke from her, with the vehement gesticulation of a man suddenly deprived of his wits, and with eyes rolling, and fists clenched, declared, with a furious oath, that if he did not get Emily Steyton's fortune, he would blow his brains out.

It was an awful thing for a poor country girl, who had never in her life witnessed any melo-dramatic performances, either on or off the stage, to listen to such a vow as this from the beloved of her heart ; and Minny was awestruck accordingly. But when he unclenched his fists, and ceased to roll his eyes, she recovered herself; for the delightful fact that no word indicative of love to her rival had escaped him in his agony was very far from being lost upon her. Moreover she had the good sense to let him get a little cooler still, before she answered him, and when she did, it was not in the language of reproach, but encouragement.

"Don't take on so !" she exclaimed, lovingly hanging upon his arm ; "there's nothing done or said yet, to prevent your having her fortune. She has called me fool and idiot, till I am got pretty well tired of hearing it, I can tell her ; but may be there are others not that much sharper than me. You get hold of her again, Mr. Stephen, and just swear away till you have got no breath left, that you can't live above a day or two longer without her ; and take the idiot Minny's word for it, that she will be ready to run off with you to-morrow. But there will be no need of any running off till such time as you run off with me, my own darling, for her father will no more refuse his consent to her marrying you, than to her marrying Squire Otterborne, who has got for his fortune a good deal less than nothing at all."

"And you really think, dearest," replied her lover, who was softened into almost gentle tenderness by her hopeful words, "you really think, my darling Minny, that her father would let her jilt the young squire in that way, without making any difference in her fortune ?"

"Let her ! LET her, indeed, Mr. Stephen !" replied the girl with a sneer ; "why he'd no more stand before her and say nay, if it was her will and pleasure to say yea, than he'd put his right hand into the fire, and his left one after it. You

never saw my young lady in one of her tantrums, darling ; but I have."

" Well, my beauty, I'll take your word for it, and act accordingly," he replied. " But the first thing to be done," he added, rather anxiously, " is for me to get at her, Minny. It seems to me that she is doing all she can to keep out of my way. That was the reason, I'll be hanged if it wasn't, for her fidgeting away after the Prices, instead of coming out of church in the common way."

" And that's true, and no mistake," returned the confidential Abigail. " She has just veered again back to the young squire, as sure as your name's Stephen ; but if you really cannot run away with me without getting her money first, why I must bear it ; and if I don't put no stumbling-block in your way, you need not be faint-hearted about bringing her round again. She is just a perfect weathercock. If she had got any of my faithful trueness of heart, Stephen, I would have scorned to come in her way. But she hasn't a bit of it ; and for all her being back again so sweet upon Mr. Herbert, I'll bet a pound to a penny that she'll be all back again to you, if you do but fool her enough. And yet I hate the thought of your making love to her worse than poison ! But what must be must be, I suppose."

" And this must be, I promise you, my darling," replied the young man, with a tender caress ; " though I am no more in love with her, Minny, than I am with her fat mother ; and you may guess how much that is."

This lively sally put the faithful-hearted Jemima into such perfect good-humour, that she entered, in the frankest manner possible, into a consultation with her lover as to the ways and means of his obtaining a *tête-à-tête* interview with her mistress —an interview which they both felt to be extremely important, and which he was very fully determined should be decisive.

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### CHAPTER XXXIX.

In the copse-like little wood which surrounded three sides of Mr. Steyton's handsome mansion, a pretty little room had been

erected in the form of a Grecian temple, inscribed above the door of which might be seen, in letters of gold, the words,

"SACRED TO FRIENDSHIP."

The erection of the temple had been the work of Mr. Steyton's predecessor; the touching inscription had been suggested by the beautiful Emily, when she was at home for her last midsummer vacation, before she finally left school.

To this temple, "sacred to friendship," Miss Emily never failed to introduce all the young gentlemen of her acquaintance, and she was rewarded for the amiable temper which she displayed in thus seeking to share with her friends the pleasure which its agreeable aspect gave her, by hearing at least seven-eighths of the young gentlemen exclaim, as they read the inscription, "Oh!" or "Ah! Miss Steyton!" as the case might be, "the motto ought to be '*Sacred to love!*'"

Mr. Stephen Cornington had of course already made the visit, and made the speech; and it was to this temple that Minny promised to induce her young lady to repair immediately after breakfast on the morrow.

"I know what I'll say to make her go there," said the faithful waiting-woman, with a wink; "I'll just tell her that I think she'll find Mr. Herbert there, and you'll see if she don't go fast enough. She'll think it will be such a tip-top good opportunity for finishing the reconciliation between them."

This was said in a manner which might have checked the ardour and the hopes of many young gentlemen, but upon Mr. Stephen their effect was different. It only made him feel that in love, as in war, all stratagems are lawful.

This conversation indeed was, on the whole, extremely satisfactory to both parties, for Mr. Stephen became more strongly convinced than ever, that the divine Emily was exactly the sort of treasure to be won by a *coup-de-main*; and Miss Jemima felt equally well assured, that the obtaining her young lady's fortune by permitting the captivating Stephen to marry her before he ran away with her happier self, was a necessity to which, perforce, she must submit herself, if she ever hoped to be run away with at all.

If the calculations of the young man concerning his influence with the heiress were as well founded and as correct as those of her confidential maid, no plot could promise fairer to come to a successful conclusion; for no sooner had Minny observed on the

following morning that the weather was uncommonly beautiful for a walk, and that she had just seen Squire Otterborne strolling, with a book in his hand, into the "Temple of Friendship," than Miss Emily desired that her bonnet, scarf, parasol, and gloves should be instantly given to her.

These commands being obeyed, and the fair creature equipped in the most captivating manner for a stroll, she, too, seized upon a book, and sallied forth to enjoy the sun, the shade, the woodbine-scented air, or any other agreeable thing which might happen to present itself to her notice.

On entering the temple she immediately perceived that a gentleman had taken possession of one of the sofas, and, as a matter of course, she started. For how was it possible she could have seen any gentleman seated in dear papa's "Temple of Friendship" without it? But when the gentleman on hearing the gentle little exclamation of "Oh!" sprang from the couch, and stood before her in the palpable form of Mr. Stephen Cornington, there was no affectation whatever in the renewed start, or the renewed "Oh!" which accompanied it.

The clever young Barbadian very skilfully took up his tender tale precisely at the point where he had left it at their last parting, which was, as we know, beneath the crumbling walls of Knightly Abbey.

All the passionate professions of undying love which had preceded this adieu, and which had been uttered beneath the trembling beams of the listening moon, can only be guessed at, because they were considerably too long and too redundant for repetition; but the last farewell pronounced on that occasion by Mr. Stephen was in these words, accompanied by a squeeze of the hand, intended to express a great deal more than any words could possibly do.

"Good night, dear, darling angel! good night! Remember what you have promised me! Remember that you are mine for ever, and for ever, and for ever!"

To which Miss Emily had answered, Oh, dear me, yes! I will! I will! I will, indeed! Don't hold me any more; the people will see you!"

To which reasonable remonstrance he had murmured in reply, "Adieu, my angel wife!"

And now, as I observed before, he began again where he had left off, and throwing himself on his knees before her, exclaimed again, "My angel wife!"

But oh, the heavy change! Instead of trembling a little,

sighing a little, and blushing a good deal, the young lady gave a vigorous spring backwards, so as to extricate her dress, as well as her hand, from his grasp, and exclaimed, "Mercy on me ! Mr. Stephen Cornington, what in the world is the matter with you ?"

I have confessed that Mr. Stephen Cornington, although one of my heroes, was not constitutionally brave ; but this involuntary weakness, if it may be called one, never displayed itself to the fair sex. Towards them he was ever brave, almost to excess ; and he now started to his feet with an aspect almost as furious as that which on the preceding day he had exhibited to Minny, during their confidential interview in the lane.

In reply to this unexpected inquiry as to what was the matter with him, he struck his forehead, with great apparent fury, with his clenched fist, and exclaimed :

"The matter is, loveliest—but most cruel of created beings, that you must either keep the promise you have made me, and be mine, or prepare yourself to see me fall at your feet a corpse ! I will not, for I cannot live without you !"

These words would have served his purpose better had they been uttered with more of tenderness, and less of fury ; but the beautiful Emily, though most exceedingly silly, was by her nature considerably braver than her vehement lover, and instead of being alarmed by his violence, she felt not a little disposed to laugh at it. His beauty, too, was considerably impaired by his contortions, so that he really did not give himself a fair chance of recovering the place in her fluctuating affections which absence had lost, and the presence of his rival regained.

"Upon my word, it is lucky for you, Mr. Cornington," said she, "that our temple is so beautifully sheltered, for I am quite certain that anybody in the world who saw you now would think you were mad. And you may take my word for it, Mr. Stephen, that young ladies do not like madmen."

"But have you not promised to be my wife—and did we not seal the promise with a heavenly kiss by moonlight ?" was his reply. And again he approached, and attempted to take her hand.

"Please to let me alone, Mr. Stephen Cornington," she replied. "You look better by moonlight than you do by daylight, I can tell you, or you never would have got me to listen to your love-making at all. And I only did it for a frolic, as it was, for I was engaged to be married before, and I daresay you knew that as well as I did, for everybody knows it ; I did

not think you were in earnest. How could I? It was all stuff and nonsense, you know, so pray do not let us talk any more about it."

Mr. Stephen Cornington had as completely made up his mind to believe that the magnificent fortune of Miss Steyton was in his grasp, as that she had permitted her lips to be audaciously pressed by his, and the terrible disappointment which now seemed to threaten him, was really as unexpected as it was dreadful.

For a short moment the colour forsook his cheeks, and he stood trembling almost convulsively before her, and for that short moment she was very nearly frightened, because as she afterwards told Minny, he really looked horrid; but she speedily recovered herself, and felt considerably more inclined to laugh, than either to pity or fear him.

But she little guessed, poor child, the really desperate condition of the frowning young giant who stood before her.

He was already as deeply in debt to all the tailors and boot-makers of Hertford, as his fear of discovery would permit him to go, for the ready-money largesses of his doting grandfather were far from being sufficient for his current ready-money expenses, and not a single shilling that he received from him was spent in the manner in which that most confiding of grandfathers supposed.

In one respect, indeed, our handsome Barbadian was very unlucky; for, whereas Sir Charles Otterborne, who rarely suffered a day to pass without challenging him to a match at billiards, lost constantly and betted high, but with no other payment than a very punctually-entered memorandum, in a book kept expressly for the purpose, the bets, as constantly lost to an accomplished marker at Hertford, were paid, perforce, with unerring punctuality.

In short, the young man was about equally destitute and desperate, and being, moreover, endowed as largely with brutality, as sparingly with courage, his rage and disappointment, together with the certainty of Minny's co-operating evidence, suggested to the young villain the idea of placing her in such an equivocal position as would both avenge the scornful, quizzing sort of smile that he read in the thoughtless girl's eye, and secure to him the immediate possession of her hand, with nearly as much certainty as he could wish.

" You know I adore you!" he exclaimed, suddenly throwing his arms around her; "you know I cannot live without you!"

"Let me alone then, Mr. Stephen, if you please," said Emily, passionately, but evidently with more anger than terror. "You really ought to be ashamed of yourself; you know I told you from the very first that I was engaged to somebody else, and so I am. But if I was not, I am quite sure now that I would never engage myself to you, unless it was by way of a joke, on purpose to laugh at you afterwards. I don't like your ways at all! Let me go, I tell you!"

This was uttered both passionately and rapidly, and the young man, while she continued to speak, looked stedfastly at her; but though he relaxed the rude violence of the grasp in which he held her, he did not withdraw the arm that encircled her waist. He seemed keenly watching her, as if determined to discover her real feelings and her real purposes.

But the result of this examination did not appear to inspire him with any confidence in her returning love, or even with any hope of such patient indulgence as might make him look forward to the renewal of her tender feelings for him in future; for, upon her repeating her remonstrance in a still more angry tone, he only replied, "No! I will not release you! No power on earth shall make me give you up! You are mine; mine to your dying day!"

The brutal vehemence with which he uttered these words made the now really terrified girl begin very seriously and decidedly to fear that they were intended as a dreadful threat, and after making another violent but vain effort to extricate herself from his clutches, she remained perfectly still for a moment, as if to collect her strength, and then uttered a succession of screams, which might almost have sufficed to reach the house, so shrill and so loud were they in their excessive terror.

But Mr. Stephen Cornington calculated the distance too accurately to be at all alarmed on that account, and the strength of the unfortunate Emily was failing her fast, when a hasty step was heard approaching, and nearly in the same instant the stalwart shoulders of the magnificent Stephen Cornington were saluted by a tolerably heavy blow from the butt end of a fowling-piece.

The first result of this was that the arm of the brutal Cornington relaxed its hold; and the next, that the fainting form of the beautiful Emily fell to the ground.

The spirited assailant of the villainous Stephen was a man as young as himself, but very greatly his inferior in size and strength, for it was the light and active figure of William

Price that the cowardly culprit recognised, as he turned to see from whence the blow he had received proceeded.

"What business have you to interrupt the conversation of this young lady and myself?" cried Stephen, sulkily, and evidently endeavouring to conceal his alarm under a bullying aspect.

"Take yourself off, you villain!" cried the young man, whose opportune arrival had put a stop to what might have been a very frightful tragedy. "Leave this building instantly, or I will lodge the contents of my gun in your face. It may not be heavy enough to kill you, Master Cornington, but it will do to maul your pretty face a little."

"Yes, Master Price, I shall take myself off, not because you desire it, but because it suits my own convenience. But mind my words, young parson, for if you do not, it may be the worse for you. You have caught me kissing a pretty girl. She chooses to make a fuss about it, but that's our affair, and not yours; and if you dare open your lips to tell anybody, man, woman, or child, of what you have seen this day, you may reckon that your canting life will not be a very long one."

"Threatened men live long," replied William Price, gently raising poor Emily, who was as pale as death, and seating her on the sofa. "If I saw any advantage in relating your brutal insolence to everyone I met," he added, "I should most certainly do it, without asking your permission; but I rather suppose that this young lady will consider you too much beneath her to choose to have your name ever mentioned at all in conjunction with hers, so it is likely that you will escape on this occasion the execration you deserve. But take yourself off, if you please, and that without a moment's delay, or I'll shoot you! When Mr. Steyton gave me leave to shoot the rabbits here, he did not say a word against my shooting any other sort of *virmen* that I might happen to find upon the premises."

The delighted William Price (who certainly felt happier at that moment than he had ever done in his life, for the beautiful Emily was actually resting her drooping head upon his arm as he stood beside her,) looked as triumphantly happy as he felt; and, moreover, he looked very handsome too. This was altogether more than the peppery West Indian could bear, and he retorted with a vehemence of voice, look, and gesture, that was rather appalling—taking care, however, to retreat backwards towards the door as he spoke—

"You threaten my life, you murdering heretic, do you?

That's your way of doing business, is it? Mine is different, but it may answer better in the end. I have changed my mind, Sir, about keeping this matter secret; I now think it will suit me better to have it known, and known it shall be, I promise you, do what you may to prevent it. That girl is my wife, at least in the way that many good marriages are made. I did not meet her here for nothing, and if you are fool enough to believe I did, her father, for one, will understand the matter better, and will be glad enough, I take it, to agree to any terms I may choose to propose, to make our marriage of the sort that people call respectable. So I wish you good morning, young man, and give you my permission to publish all you have seen and all you may guess."

And with these words he left the temple sacred to friendship, and was soon concealed by the thick underwood, his path being very evidently chosen where it would be most difficult to trace him.



## CHAPTER XL.

THE untamed spirit and fine health of the beautiful Emily made her more able than most young ladies would have been, to shake off the weakness which had overpowered her in a moment of extreme terror; and she heard and understood every word of Mr. Stephen's parting address as distinctly as her young champion did.

The mind of Emily Steyton was not a very refined mind; and her folly in most things, and especially in her love affairs, was as great as it was well possible for ignorance and vanity to make it; she had, however, both sense and feeling enough to estimate pretty nearly at its worth the atrocious villainy of the desperate young bully who had left the room.

"Do you believe him—do you believe him, William Price?" cried the poor girl, bursting into an agony of tears. "Oh! what will become of me! Everybody will believe him! Everybody must believe him; for who will suppose it possible that any human being could be wicked enough to say such things if they were not true?"

Even if Mr. William Price had not been violently in love with her, which he most assuredly was, he could not have witnessed the real agony expressed in that fair young face unmoved. Every feature was working, and her clenched hands were raised towards heaven in an attitude that might have been studied by an artist as an expression of despair.

Mr. William Price was not what is called a clever young man, but he was handsome, gentleman-like, and kind-hearted; and, moreover, had enough both of quickness and good sense, to perceive that he, of all mankind, was the most capable at that moment of administering consolation to the outraged Emily.

"Do not make yourself so miserable, dearest, dearest Miss Steyton! for anything that contemptible animal can say!" he exclaimed, dropping on his knees before her; "for have you not a witness in me, who would not only willingly sacrifice his life to serve you, but who can, upon his own knowledge, give the lie to every syllable the villain uttered which could wound your feelings?"

"Then you do not believe what he said about me—that—that I ought to be his wife?" replied Emily, her whole countenance relaxing from the terrible expression of despair, and gradually assuming, as she listened to him, such a beautiful look of hope and gratitude as might have touched to the quick a heart less susceptible than that of Mr. William Price.

"Believe him, Miss Steyton?" he exclaimed. "How is it possible I could believe him, after witnessing what I did witness?"

"Good gracious! that is quite true, to be sure! Then you, at least, William Price, will do me justice," said she.

"And so will every one else, my dear, dear Miss Steyton!" he ardently replied. "You and I, in our hearts," he added, "may believe from what we have seen and heard, that he is really villain enough to have been capable of any crime, but we know, too, by the blessing of God .."

"That by the blessing of God you came to save me!" she cried, interrupting him with tears in her eyes, yet with happiness and gratitude beaming in every feature.

"And if I were to die to-morrow, I feel that I have lived long enough to have enjoyed a happiness greater than all that the longest and most prosperous life could bestow!" he replied, with such deep sincerity of feeling, that, man as he was, his handsome blue eyes were swimming in tears.

"Good gracious, Mr. William Price!" said Emily, with very perfect *naïveté*; "I am sure I never thought that you cared so much about me, before."

"Not care for you!" replied the enamoured youth, with irrepressible energy,—"not care for you? Oh! if I have never dared to show you all I have dared to feel, do me, at least, the justice to believe, that it has been a sense of my own inferiority that has kept me silent, and not because I was either blind or indifferent, to charms greater than I ever did, or ever can behold in woman!"

She looked very earnestly in his face as he spoke, as if to be quite sure that she was not mistaken, and then said,—

"Good gracious, Mr. William Price! I can hardly believe my ears. Are you really in love with me? Only fancy that I should never have found it out!"

"Oh! Emily, too, too lovely Emily! I must and would have died before I confessed my audacity, had it not been for the extraordinary events of the last hour."

"Good gracious!" returned Emily, gratefully holding out her hand to him; "I am sure I am very glad you did not die, William Price! What would have become of me if you had? I am sure I must have died too, for it would have been the only thing that was left for me to do. But you must promise me one thing, William Price, you must, indeed, and if you won't promise it, I really don't think that I will ever speak to you again. You must promise me, this very minute, that you will not fight that brutal monster, Cornington. Will you promise me?"

The young man was silent.

"Promise me, I tell you," she repeated, passionately.

"How can I promise you?" he replied. "Did I not strike him? You saw me strike him, Miss Steyton, and it is impossible to refuse a man's challenge after that, you know."

"But Stephen Cornington is not a man, but a monster," replied Emily. "Besides if I tell you that I won't let you do it, you can't, you know, after what you have just said to me, do anything that I tell you not to do. Well, to be sure, this is a morning of adventures! To fancy my finding out that you are in love with me, just in time to prevent your making a fool of yourself by fighting that monster."

"My dearest Miss Steyton!" he replied, "all that I can do to prove the obedience which you so kindly require, I promise to perform. I promise, dear, lovely Emily, not to seek a

meeting with Cornington, if he does not seek it with me, and I very strongly suspect that this will be quite sufficient to render it certain that there will be no hostile meeting between us at all for if ever I saw a coward in my life, I saw one when that audacious liar crept away yonder among the bushes. But having given this promise, too, too lovely Emily ! may I not be rewarded for it by hearing you say that you never did really like that audacious and most presuming puppy ? I have, in common with all the neighbourhood, been made, of course, to understand that you are engaged to be married to the happy, thrice happy, ten thousand times happy Herbert Otterborne. But he is a gentleman who might think himself justified, if any man living might do so, in seeking the honour of your hand. But there are people in our gossiping neighbourhood, who have not scrupled to assert that you have slighted Herbert Otterborne in order to encourage the presumptuous hopes of this audacious ruffian. Tell me too, too lovely Emily, only tell me that this report is false, and I feel as if I could lie down and die in peace."

"Good gracious, William Price, I don't see why you should talk about dying at all !" replied Emily, looking at him very kindly, "but if you will sit down quietly for a few minutes, I will not only tell you what you have asked, but a great deal more too. I am sure you have proved yourself to be a true friend, if ever any one did, and I don't see why I should not ask your advice, just as if you were my own brother, for I am sure I want advice if ever girl did."

"To serve you, to help you, to advise you, dear, dear Miss Steyton, ought to be happiness enough for any one. But I will not be such a hypocrite as to say that I can ever feel towards you like a brother towards a sister !" he replied, with great gentleness, but great solemnity.

"Well, well, William Price, never mind about that just now. If you can't you can't, you know, so there is no good in talking about it," she replied; "besides, as I told you before," she added, "you have proved yourself to be a true friend, as much as any brother could do, and therefore I shall tell you everything just the same It is quite true what you were saying about Herbert Otterborne. I did like him, or at least I fancied I liked him, very much indeed, and everything was settled, as I dare say you heard, for our marriage, as soon as ever the lawyers could have got all their work about the money done And dear Louisa, you know, was to have been

one of my bridesmaids, and I am sure I had no thought of changing my mind at all."

"And have you changed your mind about Mr. Otterborne? Is it really possible that you have changed your mind about him?" cried William Price, colouring to the temples, and with his eyes looking vastly brighter and more intelligent than they had ever looked before since he first opened them upon the light of day.

"Good gracious, William Price! What a hurry you are in!" replied Emily, blushing in her turn, and also looking exceedingly intelligent, and beyond all question exceedingly beautiful.

"I am sure I can't tell how it happened at first," she continued, beginning to tie knots in her pocket-handkerchief with rather an embarrassed air; "I believe it was because I thought that he seemed to like his mother better than he liked me; and then I believe I only did it to plague him I let that great horrid giant of a foreigner walk with me, and talk with me, like a fool and ignorant young girl as I am. But the truth is that I am not very old as yet, William Price, and I dare say I shall grow wiser when I am, for they say everybody does that."

William Price did not venture to take her hand, but he ventured to take hold of the knotted pocket-handkerchief, and looking in her eyes with all the eloquence of truth beaming from his own, he exclaimed, "Only be wise enough to know true love, true devotion, most adorable Emily, when you find it, even in one so little worthy to approach you as I am! . For then perhaps your gentle heart will lead you to forgive my boldness, in consideration of my truth."

And her gentle heart did forgive his boldness, and that too, for the excellent good reason he had assigned.

In a word she really and sincerely felt his truth, and was very decidedly a good deal touched by it.

But the poor girl began to feel that it would be better for her to lay her aching head upon her pillow now, than to go on talking to anybody, even to such a tried and true friend as William Price. She again turned very pale, and the frightened young man began to feel almost as desirous as she did herself, to get her to the house, and leave her to recover herself.

"Let me go to my own room, William Price, and then I shall be better able to think over everything," said she, rising, yet looking as if very little able to walk.

"Lean on me ! lean on me !" he said, gently drawing her arm within his.

She looked at him for a moment, earnestly, but it was not a coquettish, or even a flirting look.

"You have been very, *very* kind to me !" she said, while a quiet tear or two escaped from her eyes ; and then they silently moved on together towards the house.

When they had nearly reached it, she stopped, and looking up in his face, said very confidentially, "Do you think, William Price, that I ought to mention all this to mamma, or not ?"

Not to press the arm that rested on his as she said this was impossible ; but William Price was not a presuming young man, and he did it very gently, and it might seem, as he did not immediately reply, that the movement only indicated his wish to pause a little longer for the purpose of considering the rather important question which had been put to him.

After a short pause however, he replied, "In my opinion, my dearest Miss Emily, it would be best, at least for the present, to say nothing about it to anyone. Indeed, at this moment I am quite certain that you are not strong enough to talk about it to anybody. You are trembling now ! Dearest, dearest Emily ! Would to heaven I dared to take you in my arms, and carry you to your room !"

"Indeed you are very kind to me, dear William Price, and I don't think I shall ever forget it," said poor Emily, sobbing. "I don't think there is anybody, no not anybody in the world, that would have been so kind to me in every way as you have been ! And I think you are quite right about not telling mamma, or anybody, and it will be such a comfort not to be obliged to talk of it !"

"Indeed I think so," he replied ; "nor do I imagine that there is the least danger of Cornington's executing the brutal threat which he uttered as he went away. But even if he should dare to circulate any of his own horrible lies about what has passed, I have the comfort of knowing that I have been longer and better known in the neighbourhood than he has, and that my testimony will be listened to before his."

"That's true ! and I thank God for it !" replied poor Emily, fervently, "and that is one reason among others why I may owe more to you than to anybody else in the wide world. But go away now, dear William Price, will you, please ! We are close now to the garden door, and I shall go in by that. Good-bye ! God bless you !"

And as she spoke she withdrew her arm, and offered to shake hands, as she reiterated her "Good-bye!" He took her hand and retained it in his for a moment, while he said with very considerable agitation, "Let me know the worst at once! When are you to be married to Herbert Otterborne?"

"Good gracious me! How can I tell?" replied Emily, looking as perfectly frightened at the question as if the idea was quite new to her.

"The lawyers are still at work? The engagement still continues?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, with a deep sigh, "I believe so! But upon my word and honour, William Price, now I have had a little more time to reflect upon it, I do not think we ought to be married, for I do not think we are the least bit suited to each other."

"Then promise me that you will take a little more time still to think about it! Only promise me that, and I will go this instant."

"Well, then, I do promise it," she replied.

"And may I call to know how you are to-morrow?" said he, eagerly.

"Yes, certainly! I don't think I am going to deny you that, after all that has happened this morning. You can come up with Louisa, you know."

He only stayed one half-instant longer to kiss her hand, and then turned away, and, with a rapid step, soon ensconced himself and his gun amidst the thickest shades of the copse.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

THE effect of Jemima Stokes' visit to Herbert Otterborne has been already related, and she felt, as she well might do, perfectly satisfied by the result of it, as it produced precisely all the consequences she intended; that is to say, her father suspended the threatened arrest, that the again prosperous wooing of the young squire might not be interrupted. But her subsequent interview with her lover had again changed all her projects, for it left her with the persuasion that it was,

indeed, absolutely necessary that the ceremony of marriage should pass between her lover and the heiress, if she still hoped that his promises of subsequently eloping with her, and accompanied with a good portion of poor Emily's money, should ever be fulfilled. And in order the more easily to achieve this, she lost no time in conveying to her father the assurance that her mistress had again changed her mind, and now declared that she had a great deal rather die than marry the young squire of the Manor-house.

The careful carpenter, however, did not receive this very disagreeable intelligence as true, without subjecting his fair and very clever daughter to a sharp and strict cross-examination. But her evidence was as clear as it was positive, and the consequence was that not only Mr. Stokes, the carpenter, but two other tradesmen, after consulting together, came to the conclusion that they would wait one week more, but no longer, and that if nothing occurred within that time to make them doubt the truth of Minny's statement, the three writs with which he had long been threatened should all be issued against the baronet at once.

The reason for this confidential union between parties who might have found it more profitable each to pursue his own object alone, was that upon more than one similar occasion the well-practised creditor had contrived to make his escape by starting for London in one direction, when his own servants believed him to be paying a morning visit in another. This manœuvre was now, however, effectually guarded against, as if he escaped an arrest on the left, he was sure to meet it on the right.

Meanwhile, Sir Charles was the gayest of the gay, jesting with his creditors, both in town and country, upon this pleasant new way of paying old debts.

Things were in this state when the privacy of Mrs. Mathews was again invaded by the very abrupt entry of Mr. Cuthbridge into her den. Their *tête-à-tête* was again an unbroken one, for Janet was again at the Manor-house, and Mrs. Mathews was, at the moment of his entrance in very full enjoyment of a new German novel. But though the profound nature of her studies, or rather the profound attention she was bestowing upon them, must have been sufficiently obvious, the priest made no apology for his intrusion, but closing the door of the room rather carefully after he had entered it, he abruptly approached her, and grasping her arm instead of taking her offered hand, he said,

"Mrs. Mathews! I am going to prove that I have great confidence in you, and I expect you to prove in return that you have great confidence in me."

She looked at him with surprise, and seemed for a moment to think that he was jesting, but this mistake did not last long, and pointing to a chair near her, she replied, "Be it so, my good friend, and I do not think that we shall either of us be disappointed."

"Do you bear in your remembrance what I said to you the other day on the subject of oral confession?" said he.

"I think I do," she replied. "You said, if I mistake not, that it ought to be held sacred."

"Not quite that," he rejoined, "I could not so apply the word sacred. But I told you that the betraying it would be repugnant to my feelings."

"Yes. You are right. That was the purport of what you said. You went no further," said she.

"Yet now I am come to you for the express purpose of committing this repugnant act, and were my doing so to be known, or in the least degree suspected, my position as a priest, as a man of honour, and a gentleman, would be very sorely changed."

"You are very safe, old friend, in thinking that none of this is likely to be the consequence of your committing this offence before me; nevertheless, my dear Mr. Cuthbridge, I would greatly prefer your not doing so," said Mrs. Mathews.

"I have no doubt of it, my honourable friend," replied the priest, "but I very earnestly entreat that you will not refuse to listen to me. Trust for once, both in your own case, and mine, to my power of judging between conflicting duties. My not betraying this confession would, in my judgment, be a greater sin than betraying it; and you may do more good to others by listening to it than you can do to yourself by refusing to do so. Will you in this be guided by me? Do I deserve thus much confidence at your hands?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Mathews, after the meditation of a moment. "I think you do. Speak on, Sir priest!"

"Alas! this is no jesting matter," he replied, "for a very fearful sin is about to be committed if we do not interfere to prevent it. That noble fellow, Herbert Otterborne, is about to marry the daughter of Steyton. Is it not so?"

"Yes, certainly. To the best of my knowledge and belief it is so," replied Mrs. Mathews.

"No! not for the world, Mrs. Mathews, must that marriage take place! And you must prevent it. By some means or other it must and shall be prevented. That idiot girl has already given herself to your precious grandson, Mrs. Mathews; will you permit Herbert Otterborne to marry the mistress of Stephen Cornington?"

"No! on my life, he shall do no such thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews, vehemently. "Gracious heaven!" she added, "is everything I most love and value to be destroyed by that hateful boy?"

"I know not how in other ways he may be able to injure you, or how far it may be possible to prevent it," said Mr. Cuthbridge, "but we may prevent his throwing over his mistress to be the wife of the high-minded, unsuspecting Herbert. That boy has been for years my playfellow, my companion, and my friend. Were he a Papist, his attachment to me would be a very different tie; for the Papist makes his priest the stepping-stone to heaven, and whether by birth a prince or a peasant, a priest is always a priest. But the case was different between Herbert Otterborne and myself. In the judgment of the English Protestant, the paid retainer of an English Papist can rank but little above his menials; but not only has no such feeling ever mixed itself with Herbert's affection for me, but, your grace as he is, he has contrived to give me a sort of esteem and popularity in the neighbourhood that I never should have had without him. And shall I see him give his honourable hand in wedlock to the mistress of this young bastard villain?"

"Be tranquil, Mr. Cuthbridge. Be satisfied, Herbert Otterborne shall never marry the mistress of Master Stephen Cornington. And now sit down quietly, if you can, and let us settle between us how best it can be prevented."

It was with a very blank look, and a not very encouraging shake of the head, that the priest complied with her request, and sat down.

"All that I am quite certain of at present respecting the task I have assigned you, my good friend, is, that it must be done. *Coule qui coule*, Mrs. Mathews, it must be achieved, but as to the best way, or any way at all of doing it, I as yet see nothing before me but danger and difficulty."

"Is that the way in which you usually encourage your penitents, Sir priest, when you command them to perform some pious task?" said Mrs. Mathews, endeavouring to smile, but feeling in truth most exceedingly anxious and uncomfortable.

"I presume that the difficulty arises from your doubts as to my having sufficient confidence in myself to undertake the task you set before me; and the danger, as I take it, must lie in the excellent good chance there seems to be that our interference may force a gentleman to stand and be shot at by a blackguard. Is it not so?"

"No, Mrs. Mathews," he replied; "I have no doubts whatever, nor ever had since I saw you determined to write Latin verse more correctly than I could do, that you should feel any want of confidence in yourself. Neither do I anticipate the slightest chance that our friend Herbert should have to be shot at by Mr. Mathews' grandson. It is by no means impossible, I think, that Master Stephen may in some way or other get horsewhipped; but that necessity would not frighten either of us, would it?"

As Mr. Cuthbridge said this, the stern expression of his features seemed to relax, and he looked at her, as in days of yore, with something like a quizzing smile.

But it was now her turn to look grave; and she did so, poor lady, quite involuntarily, but so visibly as rather to disconcert her companion. Why should she look grave, or rather, why should she look almost heart-broken, because he mentioned the possibility of Stephen Cornington being horsewhipped? But not even to her old friend could she confess that by her own wilful act and deed, this detested Stephen Cornington was to inherit every shilling of her property, while her Janet would be left penniless!

There was something so desperately galling in this terrible remembrance that it would have been overwhelming, had not the tough nature of Mrs. Mathews contrived to create a sort of *callus* round the thorny thought, which enabled her to bear it without wincing. But at this moment the thorns were stronger than the *callus*, and she did wince.

Mr. Cuthbridge looked at her with surprise, and with something of vexation too. He was in truth disappointed, for he did her the great wrong of believing that she felt too nearly connected with the culprit to relish the idea of his being publicly disgraced. But the pang at the heart of poor Mrs. Mathews, though sharp, was short; she instantly perceived the painful effect which her grave reception of his words had caused him, and removed it at once by exclaiming,

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Cuthbridge, do not look as if you thought I was going to weep, because there may be a chance

that my precious grandson should be whipped ! But heaven help me, good priest, I do feel, now and then, as if I should like to weep because I had got him here unwhipped."

" If that be all, I give you absolution," replied the priest, greatly comforted ; " and now then, to business, for I tell you there is no time to be lost. It is only two days ago that poor Herbert was with me, and he came expressly to say that he believed his marriage would take place immediately, and that as he intended making Munich the principal object of his wedding tour, he should be able to examine for me one of the old treasures of the library there, which he knew I wished to consult. We must be quick, Mrs. Mathews. I tell you that no time must be lost."

Mrs. Mathews pressed one hand to her eyes, and extended the other towards him, as a signal that he was to be silent while she employed a few moments in meditation. He understood her, and obeyed ; and for the space of at least a hundred and twenty seconds they both remained profoundly silent.

" You will not think my device a very subtle one," she said, at length ; " but my opinion is, that the forbidding of the banns must proceed from Lady Otterborne."

Mr. Cuthbridge remained silent for a moment, and then said, with anything but a satisfied air, " I do not understand you."

" Who else is there, Mr. Cuthbridge, to whom he is likely to listen ? I have no doubt in the world, and you can have none either, that the unfortunate young man's only reason for forming the detestable alliance is, that he may save his mother from the misery of being turned out of her house in order that her husband's creditors may take possession of it, or at least of all that it contains. As yet, Herbert has, I well know, succeeded in persuading her that the beauty of the young lady has fascinated him ; and believing this, and knowing of no harm in the wretched girl beyond her deficiency in such a degree of intellect, and such a degree of polish, as she might have wished for in her son's wife, she has very properly, in my opinion, abstained from all opposition to a marriage which would at once relieve him from all the terrible embarrassments with which his unprincipled father has overwhelmed him. But one word from Lady Otterborne, one little word, signifying that Miss Steyton's indiscreet conduct on the night of the Knightly Abbey pic-nic, and *other circumstances into which she did not choose to enter*, made her—Lady Otterborne, I mean—feel that she could never receive her as a daughter, one word from

her to this effect, Mr. Cuthbridge, would achieve all that we want."

"And do you think, Mrs. Mathews, that you have sufficient influence upon her mind to persuade her of the propriety, of the *rectitude*, of her doing this, without quoting my authority?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Mathews.

"And you will immediately see her," he rejoined, "for the purpose of trying the experiment."

"I will go this very hour, this moment," she replied.

"God bless you, my dear, energetic friend! I well knew that if I found help from any one it would be from you," he replied, looking so greatly comforted as to be almost like his tranquil self again.

"I wish I might walk across the park with you," added he, "but this I must not. My penitent might see us together, and I would rather avoid this. I did my best to receive his rascally confession with the professional imperturbability of a priest, but I do not feel quite certain that I succeeded."

"What makes you doubt it?" inquired Mrs. Mathews. "Was it his manner or your own feelings which produced the doubt?"

"A little of both, I believe," was his reply. "He looked for a moment, as he might have done if he had been more anxious to find out what I thought would be the consequence of what he had confessed, than of the confession itself, or my opinion of him in consequence of it."

"Did he?" said Mrs. Mathews, and then she stopped.

"Yes," returned her companion, "I thought so for a moment, but I daresay I was mistaken. I take him to be a very dissolute, worthless scamp, who trusts to his handsome person and his grandfather's protection for bringing him safely through all the scrapes he may get into. I really think I did him more than justice in believing it possible that he had any feeling of shame, or anything but the most daring libertine indifference as to the consequences of what he had disclosed."

"Perhaps you are right, and perhaps you are wrong," she replied, as she rose from her chair, and prepared to leave the room. "I will leave you here if you like to stay; for, by way of a priest, I believe you to be indifferent honest, and that you are not likely to steal any of my treasures; but I am in haste to do my errand, so farewell."

And so saying she hastened to her own room to equip herself for her walk; but when she sallied forth in the direction which

led to the park ladder, she saw, walking away together in the opposite direction, her friend, Mr. Cuthbridge, and her grandson, Mr. Stephen Cornington ; and as she went, she whispered to herself,—

“ Perhaps, after all, his grandmamma understands him better than his confessor.”

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## CHAPTER XLII.

MRS. MATHEWS found Lady Otterborne and Janet *tête-à-tête* as usual in the beautiful room, half-boudoir, half-library, which was considered as sacred to her ladyship's use. It was there, and it was thus, that very nearly all the hours devoted by Janet to Lady Otterborne were passed.

The thought and the hope of awakening a comparison in the mind of her son between the blazing beauty of Emily Steyton and the delicate loveliness of Janet had long passed away, and it would have been strange indeed if it had not ; for it had soon become very evident that the charm which Herbert used to find in his long *tête-à-tête* gossiping with his mother had ceased to exist for him when the *tête-à-tête* was converted into a trio.

It was not so much his manner, when for a short interval he occasionally visited Lady Otterborne's retreat as formerly, which suggested to her the idea that he did not consider the presence of Janet an additional attraction,—for he was always very civil to her,—but it was the very notorious fact that when Janet was staying in the house, his visits to the boudoir were both less frequent and less long than formerly ; and now it should seem as if poor Janet really had something about her that was inimical to the enjoyment of confidential intercourse, for scarcely had Mrs. Mathews entered the room than she whispered to her adopted child to leave it.

Janet coloured a little, but instantly obeyed, and ever being in possession of some pleasant volume that would serve for the time being as most excellent company, she retired to the pretty room that was now always designated as “ Miss Anderson's,” and left her two maternal friends alone.

And how did Mrs. Mathews open her important mission ? Did she tell Lady Otterborne, as Mr. Cuthbridge certainly intended she should do, of the terrible degradation of poor Emily, accompanied by a solemn and mysterious assurance that although accident had put her in possession of the fact, no inquiry must be made as to the source from whence she had obtained it ? Was it thus that Mrs. Mathews executed her commission ? ”

No, she did nothing of the kind.

The walk between the Grange and the Manor-house was not a long walk, but Mrs. Mathews had taken it slowly, and by doing so had given herself time sufficient to ruminate upon the singular statement which she had listened to from her old friend, and to draw her own conclusions upon it.

The result of this was that she greatly doubted the truth of Mr. Stephen Cornington’s confession.

It would be very greatly exaggerating Mrs. Mathews’ acuteness were I to say that she perfectly understood the character of Stephen Cornington. She was very far indeed from doing so ; nevertheless she understood considerably more of it than any other individual of his Hertfordshire acquaintance.

She had, in truth, very often amused herself by studying his little crooked clever ways with his grandfather. From the very first evening, ay, from the very first hour of his arrival, she had convinced herself that there was no truth in him ; and from that day to the one which had now exhibited him to her as the sinning, but humble penitent, who had conscientiously knelt before his confessor and priest, and confessed his sins, she had gone on, day by day, to be more and more fully convinced that there was, indeed, no truth in him.

Had she heard from any other quarter precisely the same statement which had now reached her as being made by himself, she would probably have believed it without much difficulty, for she disliked the looks and the ways of poor Emily Steyton exceedingly, and certainly, on the whole, thought worse of her than she deserved ; so that the same terrible tale from another quarter might not have found her so strongly disposed to disbelieve it as perhaps she ought to have been.

But coming from *Him* it had from the very first moment appeared doubtful, and before, considerably before she had reached the boudoir of Lady Otterborne, she had convinced herself most completely to her own satisfaction that it was false.

Nor was she at any loss to comprehend the motive which had led to its invention. However light and lively the monkey tricks of Stephen Cornington had been in the eyes of others, they had all been full of meaning to her. She had, accidentally, happened to observe him when his grandfather, while giving him a catalogue *raisonnée* of the whole neighbourhood, had dwelt a little upon the interesting fact that one of the richest heiresses in England was one of it.

She had noted the aroused attention, the inquiring eye, the thoughtful look, enduring for a single moment only, but indicating a meditative process within that might, as she guessed, last longer. And then she marked his introduction to the heiress, and then his reception of the important news that she was about to be married to Herbert Otterborne.

She had seen plainly enough that this news was no pleasant news, but she had seen at no great distance of time afterwards, that it had not caused him to despair.

And then she watched the poor girl's silly ways with him.

She read as plainly as if it had been printed in one of her most splendid volumes, that the girl thought him very handsome, and that she liked greatly to believe that he thought her so. But Mrs. Mathews was essentially the very reverse of a gossiping old woman. She could amuse herself for hours together, when not in a talking mood, by finding out what people were at ; but never did she dream of amusing herself by communicating her occult discoveries to others. In fact, her speculations would have lost all their value had they not been for herself alone.

In the case of her valued young friend, Herbert, she had for some time been soothing herself with the hope that Sir Charles would be arrested before the long-winded settlements could be completed, and that the consequence of such an event upon Mr. Steyton and his family might be such as to leave her highly-esteemed Herbert poor, but free.

But with all this she had nothing to do, she could have nothing to do ; and it required all the influence of Mr. Cuthbridge to induce her to act as she was now doing. The request had been made by him with a degree of solemnity which had rendered her incapable of refusing it ; moreover, she had felt, as she listened to his frightful statement, that, rather than suffer Herbert Otterborne to marry Emily Steyton, she would have enacted the part of town-crier to prevent it.

But the observation he had dropped so casually respecting

his young penitent's manner of watching the effect of his confession, had struck her as being highly characteristic of her little-loved Stephen ; and the additional circumstance of his having been on the alert to watch the movements of the priest, at once produced a feeling, wonderfully like conviction, in her mind, that the decidedly improbable sin he had confessed, was a lie, and that his hope of preventing Emily's marriage with Herbert was the motive for it.

Her profound and perfectly well-founded conviction of the duplicity of the young man's character made this, in her opinion, as probable in this case as it would be the reverse in most others ; neither did she forget, what it was so very certain the young man would remember, namely, that though the librarian of Proctor Castle was a Papist, his friendships and associations were altogether Protestant, and that his well-known attachment to Herbert Otterborne, in particular, rendered it rather more than probable that by some means or other he would prevent his intended marriage with Miss Steyton.

The Manor-house park was not much more than half traversed when Mrs. Mathews arrived at this conclusion. "*Ben trovato,*" she murmured, as she gently strolled onwards. "*Ben trovato,* Master Stephen ! but, nevertheless, I will do my old friend's bidding, only it shall be after my own fashion. And so my gentle grandson, I shall not have studied your handsome face, and your captivating ways for nothing."

No sooner had the obedient Janet left the room than Mrs. Mathews entered upon her delicate mission ; and nothing of so much importance was ever done more simply, or in a less startling manner.

"Forgive my having sent our little Janet out of the room, dear Lady Otterborne," said she ; "but I have something to say to you which no one but yourself must hear."

"And what is that ?" replied Lady Otterborne, with a smile that was full of neighbourly kindness ; but she changed colour, and her eye looked anxiously in the face of Mrs. Mathews, for she knew that her old acquaintance was not likely to come to her on a secret errand, unless she had really something of importance to communicate.

"I am going to put your kindness to the proof—nay, I am going to ask for a very great compliment from you," said Mrs. Mathews. "I am not very fond of gossip, and I believe my neighbours know it, for they rarely trouble me with any. But

accident has made me acquainted with what may be a fact, or may be a falsehood. I am bound not to tell you how it reached me—nay, I hold myself bound also not to tell you what it is. But yet, with all this silly-seeming mystery about me, I must venture to ask, for a short time—only for a short time, dear lady—that you will contrive, in some way or other, to impede the marriage of your son with Miss Steyton."

Lady Otterborne certainly felt, and certainly looked very much astonished.

"I see that your ladyship thinks I am taking a very unwarrantable liberty," said Mrs. Mathews, "and I should be disposed to think so myself, did I not feel that under the very peculiar circumstances of the case, I am bound, both by my high esteem for you, and my sincere attachment to your son, to act as I am now doing."

"Do not believe, for a moment, that I doubt either the kindness or the propriety of your conduct," said Lady Otterborne; "I have known you too long and too well for any such doubt to be possible. But your communication has startled me."

"I am aware that it must have done so," said Mrs. Mathews. "Nay, my words do not deserve to be called a communication; you must feel that I have given you only a dark mysterious hint, and upon a subject too, where a mysterious hint must appear most mischievous and abominable. Yet I do assure you that no other mode of action is open to me, save what must be considered as more objectionable still. For so very obscure a person as myself, who has never even profited by the kindness of the neighbourhood in becoming more intimately known to it, for such a one to do what I am doing now, without offering any better guarantee than my own word that I am acting rightly, does certainly seem to myself to be very presumptuous. But I have no choice left me."

"Do not think I doubt either your good feeling, or your sound judgment," said Lady Otterborne, eagerly. "I doubt neither; and if it be still in my power, I will act implicitly according to your instructions, although they are so darkly mysterious. But I am very far from being sure that I have any such power. We had notice by this morning's post that the settlements are at length completed, and Sir Charles is expecting the arrival of a professional gentleman by the next train to explain anything that may require explanation, and witness the execution of the deeds. I know that Sir Charles himself undertook to procure the licence, and I have little, or

rather no doubt that it is actually in the house. You perceive, therefore, my dear Mrs. Mathews, that notwithstanding my perfect confidence in you, I may still be unable to act as you desire. How will it be possible for me, at the very last moment, to tell the Steyton family that we have changed our minds? Or how can I expect to induce Sir Charles (to say nothing of my son) to make himself a party in so unjustifiable a proceeding, and that, too, without assigning any reason for it?"

Poor Mrs. Mathews became as red as scarlet while listening to this very reasonable remonstrance; but she replied unflinchingly, "Nevertheless it must be done, Lady Otterborne. Do not, I beseech you, throw the responsibility of doing it upon your son; and yet it is to him that I must apply, if you refuse me your assistance."

"No! no! For Heaven's sake do not threaten THAT! I fear for nothing, I care for nothing but for him! Tell me in what manner you propose that I should do what you require of me?"

"My dear lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews, inexpressibly pained by the agitation which her words had produced in the pale and trembling mother, "I will ask nothing of you but what I feel, as I look at you now, may be only too easily granted! Let me recommend you, Lady Otterborne, to exaggerate a little the indisposition which I too plainly see you are now suffering from. Let your son understand that you are ill, and we may be very sure that the marriage will be postponed."

"It shall be so," replied Lady Otterborne. "Tell dear Janet to go home with you, for I have too much headache to wish even for her society. Solitude is well known to be my best remedy for headache."

"But will this suffice to postpone the marriage?" said Mrs. Mathews, anxiously.

"My telling Herbert that I wish it to be postponed till I am better, will suffice," was the answer; and it was an answer that perfectly satisfied Mrs. Mathews; for she too knew Herbert well enough to be quite certain that it would produce the result desired.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

THIS day was destined to be rather an important one in the annals of Weldon, for while these scenes were passing at the Grange and the Manor-house, another, by no means less important, had been going on at the parsonage.

Immediately after breakfast Mr. William Price had again taken his gun, and again availed himself of Mr Steyton's neighbourly permission to enter the copse whenever he liked to do so for the purpose of shooting rabbits, the beautiful carnations at the Lodge having suffered much from the depredations of these dangerous neighbours.

Accident, however, again favoured him ; and instead of shooting rabbits he was, during by far the greater part of his absence from home, kneeling in a state of great beatitude at the feet of the beautiful Emily Steyton.

On leaving her he returned, with a rapid step, to the Parsonage, and going straight to his father's study, had the good fortune of finding him there, and of finding him alone.

"What on earth have you been about William, to heat yourself so violently ?" said the reverend divine, looking up from the sermon he meant to preach next Sunday ; "you are perfectly crimson, my dear boy. Have you been running ?"

"Yes, Sir ; or, at least, I have been walking very fast," replied the young man. "But, indeed, I have a great deal to do, Sir, and there is no time to be lost. I want both your advice and assistance, my dear father ! but as I think it is about a business that will give you pleasure, I hope you will excuse my troubling you. I suppose, my dear Sir, I must begin at the beginning, and confess to you, before I say any more, that I have fallen most violently in love."

The usually placid brow of the very gentlemanlike rector of Weldon was overcast, and looking rather sternly at his red and radiant son, he said,—

"Do not give me reason to suppose that I have spoiled you by my indulgence, William. You see how I am engaged, and you must be aware that I cannot be in a humour for joking."

"Indeed, Sir, you are quite mistaken if you fancy there is any joke in the matter. I am quite, *quite* serious ; and you will be so too, I am very sure, if you will only have the kindness to

listen to me. Miss Steyton, father, is the young lady with whom I have fallen in love," said Mr. William Price, with considerable solemnity.

"I thought, William," replied his reverend father, with something a little like a sneer, "I thought that Miss Steyton was immediately going to be married to the son and heir of Sir Charles Otterborne of the Manor-house."

"And a great many other people have been thinking the same, Sir," said his son; "but they are all mistaken, I assure you. Mr Herbert Otterborne has certainly been wanting to marry her, and as all the friends on both sides liked and approved it very much, the angelic Emily had not the heart to contradict and disappoint them, and, in short, she promised to consent to their wishes. But the feelings of her heart were against it, Sir; she loves me, and nobody but me, and I am this moment come from her with her full permission for our immediate elopement."

"An elopement!" cried the terrified Mr. Price, looking as if he saw canons, both military and ecclesiastical, ready to be discharged at his head. "Are you mad, William? Have I not absolutely received notice from both Sir Charles and Mr. Steyton, that my services would be required to perform the holy ceremony of matrimony between their children in my own parish church? Have I dreamed all this, or am I dreaming now, when I fancy that my own son is standing before me proposing an elopement with the bride?"

"I do not wonder, Sir, that you should think that you are dreaming; I am sure I can hardly help thinking so myself," replied William, very respectfully—for no children could have been more admirably brought up than those of Mr. Price;—"but still, I give you my word of honour, Sir, that if you will only give me your approbation and assistance, it is I who will be married to the heiress, and not Mr. Herbert Otterborne."

"William!" returned his father, solemnly, "I have never known you say what is untrue, nor have I ever known you to disobey me in any way; and I now command you to tell me the real truth, and nothing but the truth. Has Emily Steyton agreed to elope with you?"

"Yes, Sir, by all I hold sacred, she has agreed to elope with me; and so sure is she that her indulgent father and mother would give her instantly permission to please herself, that her only reason for eloping with me secretly, instead of asking their consent to the marriage, is that she fears it might be the means

of getting her father into a quarrel with Sir Charles. For the dear girl assures me, Sir, that it was entirely Sir Charles that made the match on account of her fortune, and she says, dear creature, that it would be very hard for her to be forced to marry a man who she is very sure does not care for her at all, instead of marrying one who loves her as devotedly as I do."

"It would, indeed! It would, indeed!" murmured Mr. Price, walking up and down the room with a rapid step, and holding both his hands to his forehead in a state of very evident agitation.

"I cannot bear, Sir, to cause you all this violent emotion and alarm!" said his son, looking very piteously in his face; "but what can I do? If it were a mere common attachment, I do assure you that I would try to overcome it, rather than agitate you in this dreadful way. But the attachment being so perfectly mutual, and our both of us feeling so extremely certain that we can neither of us ever love anybody else, makes it really quite impossible, my dear father, that we *can* give it up! Besides, you know, Sir, that the match must be considered a very good one for me, and I was therefore in hopes that you would not oppose it so very much."

"Oppose it! Mercy on me, what nonsense you are talking, William!" replied the father. "Who ever thought of opposing it? Do not I know, and would not your poor dear mother know, if she were consulted, that one might as well attempt to stop the sea and keep out the tide, as oppose the attachment of two self-willed young people like you and Miss Steyton? Believe me, William, I know human nature too well to make any such attempt. Alas! I only know too well that I must let things take their course! And Heaven knows neither Mr. Steyton, nor the Otterbornes either, can ever say that I had anything to do with it! But how do you think Sir Charles will bear it, William?"

"Upon my word, my dearest father, I can't tell. But our attachment is too deep-seated and sincere to permit our thinking about other people. About *you*, however, my dear father, we have thought, and that is the reason that we decided upon an elopement, because that will prove to everybody that you cannot know anything about it."

"You are quite right. Say no more about it! I do know nothing about it, and I will know nothing about it; nor your poor dear mother either. I insist upon it that she should know nothing,—nothing whatever on the subject. You are of age,

William, you are of age, and I have no longer any right to interfere. Neither do I interfere, nor will I. Go, go, my dear boy ! You have been talking a great deal of wild nonsense, I believe, and I really understand nothing about it nor will I."

All this was said very rapidly, and with a constant and rather vehement action of the rector's two hands, which action seemed to signify a wish or intention to turn his son out of doors as speedily as possible.

"I will go, Sir! I will go, Sir!" said the obedient and penitent-looking son. "But, angry as you are with me, you cannot have the heart to turn me from your doors penniless ! Give me, as an alms, my dear father, what you may think sufficient to support me for a few days, and when I appear before you again, I trust that your indulgent heart will lead you to forgive all my faults, and that you will receive me with a blessing "

There was something approaching a little to playful in the expression of the happy boy's eye as he said this, but the countenance of his reverend father was very solemnly grave ; nevertheless, it was with a hasty and a hurried action that Mr. Price, the elder, drew forth his cheque-book from his desk, and wrote a draft upon his Hertford banker for one hundred pounds. This being the second draft of precisely the same amount drawn in the parish of Weldon within a few hours, almost, of each other, and both with the same object in view, namely, the paying for the post-horses which were to convey the beautiful Emily Steyton to Gretna Green. And to make this remarkable coincidence the more complete, both the happy young gentlemen who received the said drafts had been received themselves as the accepted lover of the heiress, so that they might truly have been said to have *started fair*. Nevertheless there was one very essential difference between them, namely, that the one was false, and the other true, and if the silly beauty fell to the lot of the true lover and escaped the false loon, as the *finale* of her chance-medley love affairs, she was as lucky a beauty, and as lucky an heiress, as ever lived.

## CHAPTER XLIV

SCARCELY did Lady Otterborne find herself alone than she began to blame herself for having promised Mrs. Mathews to delude her son by telling him that she was more ill than she really felt herself to be. Her conscience told her that this was wrong in every way ; first, in uttering an untruth to him who, under her own guidance, had been taught to abhor falsehood ; and next, in endeavouring to persuade one, who loved her more dearly than any other human being in the world, that she was suffering when she did not suffer.

But, nevertheless, she was far from either intending or wishing to break her promise to Mrs. Mathews ; for not only was it a promise—and for that reason to be held sacred—but it was one which, in her heart, she knew she should keep joyfully ; for not all the obvious and manifold advantages which the noble fortune of Miss Steyton would bring, could heal the deep wound which the idea of her son's being so mated had given to her heart.

Instead, however, of going to bed and feigning sickness as an excuse for the delay which she had promised to obtain, she sent for Herbert from the library, where, as usual, he had ensconced himself, when the following conversation took place between them.

"I am afraid, my dear Herbert," said she, "that I shall startle you by a request which I am going to make—nor is that the worst part of the business, for not only will my request be startling, but it will have the still more disagreeable quality of being mysterious."

"Be it what it may, mother," replied the young man, affectionately, "it is already granted. I do not believe that it is in your power to ask anything which I should refuse."

"And for that very reason, my dearest Herbert, I ask it with a feeling of reluctance. But I, too, have given a promise, and I must keep it. I have promised a very valued friend both of yours and mine that I would contrive, by some means or other, to postpone the fulfilment of your engagement to Miss Steyton."

Herbert changed colour very perceptibly, a deep flush mounting to his very temples. "And you may not tell me from whence this strange counsel comes?" said he.

"No, Herbert, I may not," was Lady Otterborne's reply ; "but you will not think it likely that I should make myself a party to so strange a mystery had I any doubt of the trustworthiness of the individual who enforced it upon me."

"True, dearest mother ! true," he eagerly replied. "This ought to satisfy me ; and it does. And why should I attempt to conceal from you that this breathing time is very welcome to me ?" he added—"welcome, in spite of myself, and of some not quite idle fears which press upon me, that the delay you speak of may be inconvenient to my father ; for it is in vain to deny, dear mother, that the large fortune will be a great help to the estate."

"But you are one of the last of men I know, Herbert, whose choice of a wife would be influenced by such a motive ; at least I used to think so," she added, mournfully.

Poor Herbert was silent, and looked deeply distressed, for he, too, had his mystery ; and though his concealing the pressing claims of his father's creditors was the result of affection as watchful and tender as that of a mother guarding her child from suffering, he almost felt that such concealment cost more than it was worth.

The present moment, however, was decidedly not a fitting one to alter his conduct in this respect ; and he replied, that probably all human acts and deeds were produced by mixed motives ; and she, too, as it seemed, did not wish to enter upon any discussion of the feelings and motives which had influenced his selection of the beautiful and wealthy Emily for a wife ; so after the silence of a moment, she returned to the subject of the mysterious delay that had been enforced upon him, and asked him in what way he thought it would be best to obtain it.

"On that point, mother, there will be no difficulty," said he ; "for though I consider Emily Steyton to be essentially a very innocent girl, she certainly is a great flirt ; and let the final issue be what it may, I see no objection whatever to my expressing to her father my doubt whether the partiality with which she honoured me continues. I think I will go abroad for a week or two, my dear mother ; and this I have done so frequently that people may fancy, perhaps, that business of some kind or other may render my doing so necessary. If you will lend me the use of your writing-desk for five minutes, I will write my epistle to Mr. Steyton, and show it to you."

There was a degree of alacrity, and almost of hilarity, in poor Herbert's manner as he said this, which showed plainly

enough that whatever his mixed motives might be, no very passionate degree of love could make a part of them ; but his mother seemed to share his present feelings, let their source be what it might, for it was with a smile that she complied with his request, placing all necessary implements for writing most conveniently within his reach.

The composition of his epistle did not take him long, for it only contained the following lines :

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ As nothing would be so painful to me as the idea that your daughter should, from a feeling of honour, consider herself bound by an engagement, which I have had some reason to think she may consider as having been formed too hastily, I think it may be better for us both that she should be allowed a little more time before this engagement is rendered indissoluble. She is very young, and I think, dear Sir, that you must agree with me in thinking that she ought not to be hurried in a matter of such importance. That her decision on this important subject may be perfectly unbiassed, I shall go for a week or two into Belgium, and may, perhaps, revisit some of my favourite spots upon the Rhine. But my mother will always know where a letter will find me ; and whenever Miss Steyton wishes to recal me, she cannot doubt that I shall be ready to obey.

“ Believe me, my dear Sir,

“ Very faithfully yours,

“ HERBERT OTTERBORNE.”

Having read this letter to his mother, and received her sanction for sending it, he held it in his hand for a minute or two, and looked wistfully in her face. He was, in truth, at that moment very strongly tempted to open his whole heart to her, and the name of Janet was on his lips ; but he remembered the concluding clause of the letter he held in his hand, and prudently determining to persevere in the reserve he had so rigorously imposed upon himself, he rose and left the room without speaking a word.

Lady Otterborne felt as much as he did that the time of their being really confidential was not yet come ; but she was sadly disappointed, too ; for there was sympathy between them, and the name of Janet Anderson was on her lips as well as on his.

The transmission of Herbert's letter to the hands of Mr.

Steyton did not take long, and that consequential gentleman received it himself as he stood on the steps of his portico waiting for his horses to be brought round for his morning ride to Hertford.

The day for the approaching marriage of his daughter had not yet been definitively fixed, and upon seeing the approach of a servant in the Otterborne livery, he immediately concluded that the message he brought would probably decide that doubtful point. It was, therefore, with considerable eagerness that he broke the seal, well pleased to think that he should know all about it before he went into the town.

His disappointment, his astonishment, and his rage, as he read Herbert's epistle, were about equal ; and he rushed back into the house, and into the room where he knew he should find his daughter, in a state of very vehement excitement indeed.

Emily was sitting in a very meditative and lovelike sort of an attitude, with her whole length stretched upon the largest and longest sofa in the room, and her arms thrown over her head, with her interlaced fingers resting on her forehead.

"Here's what I get, Miss Emily !" he exclaimed, in a voice that would have frightened her, if she could have been frightened at anything ; "here's what I get when I offer to take up with a ruined baronet, when I know I might have had almost any lord in the land ! But it was all for true love forsooth, and I was to consent to everything, because you were so desperately fond of each other. Read that, Miss !"

Emily lazily stretched out her hand, and took the letter.

She had been studying the minute before to find out the best way of giving her papa and mamma a hint that she was not quite so much in love with Herbert Otterborne as she had been ; for she had a sort of notion that it would be better to give them a slight hint of this, before they should hear that she had eloped with dear good William Price ; but she did not exactly know how to set about it.

But this letter from Herbert was almost like a miracle worked in her favour, and her satisfaction being considerably greater than her discretion, she sprang up the moment she had read it, and throwing her arms round her father's neck gave him a violent hug.

Mr. Steyton, who had no doubt in the world that this vehement emotion on the part of his daughter was the result of despair, was on his side in so violent a rage, that he stamped

with his feet on the ground like a madman, repeating the words, "Confound him ! confound him ! confound him !" with tremendous vehemence.

Whereupon Emily burst into a shout of laughter, exclaiming, "Who ? dear papa, who ? Who do you want to be confounded ? "

"My dearest darling ! are you delirious ?" cried the doting and terrified father. "Don't laugh in that wild way, my precious child ! The villain ! The monster !"

"Who, father ? who ?" reiterated Emily, who did all she could not to laugh again. "Who are you talking about, papa ? Not about that dear good darling, Herbert Otterborne, I hope ?"

"DEAR GOOD DARLING !" ejaculated Mr. Steyton, with a groan. "You have not read his letter then, my poor child ? It is all owing to that moonlight walk ! Oh Emily ! Emily ! The whole county will say you have been refused. You have not read this dreadful letter yet."

"Yes, indeed, I have, papa," she replied ; "and I think it is the most dear, darling letter I ever read in my whole life. I can't tell you how happy it has made me !"

"Happy !" returned her puzzled father ; "why how long ago is it that you told me that it was impossible you could live, if I did not let you marry Herbert Otterborne ?"

"Oh, dear, dear papa ! that was such a monstrous time ago, and I was so very young then, that I did not know my own mind ! Please to remember that, papa !" she replied.

"And now, then, I suppose you are going to tell me that you are old enough to have fallen in love with somebody else. But don't tell me that it is the audacious puppy that walked off with you by moonlight. Don't tell me that it is that audacious Cornington !"

All Emily's inclination to laugh seemed to leave her in a moment ; she first turned pale, and then fiery red.

"Don't talk to me of that horrid monster !" she exclaimed. And then, perceiving that her father looked very seriously frightened by her vehemence, she kissed him again, but more gently, and added in her very wisest manner, "Don't be afraid of my ever falling in love with Mr. Stephen Cornington, papa ! If you and I never quarrel till that comes to pass, we shall live and die the same good friends that we are now, dear papa. I know I am but a young girl, and a great fool ; but the next time you hear of my falling in love, it won't be with such a

creature as Stephen Cornington. A girl may be a very great fool, indeed, papa, and yet not quite such a great fool as *that*. Besides, I like old friends better than new ones ; now, for instance, papa, I love Louisa Price dearly ! I love her as if she was my own sister !”

“ Well, my dear, and a very nice friend she is for you, and as well-behaved a young lady as I know anywhere. So, now, my darling, I must leave you, and take my ride, or else I shall have no appetite for my dinner. And about young Otterborne, it strikes me that he is too modest by half, and that you must answer his letter yourself, and make it as kind as you possibly can, to encourage him.”

And having said this, the portly gentleman was retiring from the room, apparently in a much more comfortable frame of mind than when he entered it ; but Emily stopped him by another hug, and by saying, in the most coaxing accents possible, “ No, dear pa, please ! Don’t make me write any letters to Herbert Otterborne ! I know I am a fool ; but, nevertheless, I am wiser than I was, for I was a greater fool still when I told you I was in love with him. I did not mean to tell a lie about it, I am sure. I never do mean to tell lies when I can help it. But it is only lately, papa, that I have found out my mistake. And I daresay Herbert’s letter means that he has found it out too ; and I think he has behaved most beautifully about it.”

“ Emily, Emily ! ” cried her father ; “ upon my life and honour I think I must send you back to school again ! The young man, too, may think perhaps that you have behaved beautifully in jilting him, but what do you think Sir Charles will say ? A pretty business it will make in the county, won’t it ? ”

“ Never you mind Sir Charles, papa, nor the county either,” returned his daughter, nodding her head, and looking very intelligent. “ I could tell you something about Sir Charles, if I chose it, that might cure your thinking me such a very great fool, after all ; though I don’t pretend to say that it had really anything to do with my changing my mind, only it makes it very lucky. Sir Charles has spent every farthing of money that he has got in the world, papa ! Minny told me that, to put me on my guard, she said ; and people do say, that it was only for the sake of your money, dear papa, that he consented about the marriage, for he thinks that, in all other ways, we are not half grand enough for him.”

"Does he, though—the proud beggar?" replied the passionate old man. "If all this that you tell me is true, Emmy, it shall be long enough before we send a letter after the young Squire, to bring him back again. I begin to think that things are best as they are, my dear. The awkwardest part of the job, Emily, is the telling everybody that is expecting the wedding that there is to be no such thing. What will the Prices say? The girl, you know, was to be bridesmaid. Won't they be monstrously provoked?"

"Never mind that, papa. Never you trouble yourself about my dear Louisa. I daresay I shall find some way or other to put her into good humour again."

And, having said this, Emily began laughing again so heartily, that her father stared at her with astonishment, and left her at last with an avowal on his lips, that she certainly was "too much of a child to be married as yet." These words renewed the burst of merriment to such a degree, that she had recourse to her pocket-handkerchief to conceal it; but the only half-stifled laugh still followed him, so that he could not for the life of him help laughing too; and he mounted his steed and rode off, apparently in very good humour, notwithstanding the startling news that had been communicated to him.

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## CHAPTER XLV

NOTHING could have been much worse timed for the convenience of Sir Charles Otterborne than this new caprice on the part of the beautiful heiress. His spirits had been lulled into a most comfortable state of repose respecting his debts in the country; for he remembered with a chuckle, that if every man in the parish knew that he was over head and ears in debt, every man in the parish, and every woman too, knew equally well how solid were the funds upon which he should soon have the power of drawing, to release himself from them.

Yet still the gay and high-spirited baronet could not always keep himself from feeling rather ill at ease, as he remembered the debts of a different character, that, at this particular time, he was owing in town. The making his son comprehend that

he had got behindhand with his country neighbours, and that a little Steyton money would be very convenient, to set things straight in that direction, was a very easy business, particularly as he could say a good deal about repairs, and could really make himself quite touchingly eloquent on the enormous expense of park paling, and on the abominable price that country carpenters charged for timber.

But the confessing to this admirable son that he must immediately contrive to raise about seven thousand pounds for him, if he did not intend to have him turned out of every fashionable club in town, for omitting to pay his debts of honour, was a very different affair ; but he nerved himself for the task, by remembering that it would be performed at a moment when seven thousand pounds might be as easily paid by Herbert as seven thousand farthings, and that, moreover, the asking for it would afford him an excellent opportunity of calling all the gods to witness his steadfast resolution never to play again.

The reasoning in this way had enabled him to endure the slow movements of the lawyers with a very tolerable appearance of composure ; but the arrival of the three following letters, on three successive days, had certainly rendered the preservation of this philosophical exterior, while awaiting the nuptials of his son, extremely difficult.

The first of the three was from a veteran nobleman, who had the reputation of never having had a bad play debt. It was rather urgent, but at the same time very affectionate. It ran thus :—

“ MY DEAR OTTERBORNE,—I give you my honour that I never sent a dun with more reluctance in my life than I now send this to you. But you, my dear old friend, know of old what my habits of doing business are, and that I am in some sort bound to carry out my system with the most perfect equality to every friend I have in the world. By some confounded accident, of which I know nothing, it has got winded that you have not yet handed over to me the three thousand six hundred that you were minus at our last settling ; and more than one fellow, upon whom I have been obliged to put the screw pretty tightly, in order to get my own, has been singing out that equality was fair play, and a good deal more of the same sort. I am sure I need not tell you, Otterborne, that I look upon you as one of the best friends I have in the world, and it must therefore be easy enough for you to guess how devilish painful

it is for me to tell you all this ; but the real fact is, that the club that turned out Fitzsmith are making a confounded riot about the absolute necessity of *equal laws* ; and, in short, after trying to keep the thing off as long as I could, I have been positively obliged to pacify them at last by saying, that, if I do not hear from you satisfactorily before the end of this week (and this is Wednesday), I shall make no further opposition, but let *club-law* take its course. In fact, there is no choice about it left me.

“ Yours, my dear fellow,  
“ Ever most faithfully,  
“ PRETONINGTON.”

The second was considerably more concise. It only contained the following words :—

“ DEAR OTTERBORNE,—I am devilish hard up, and I must trouble you to settle our books directly. I shall expect to meet you prepared at the —, on Saturday next.

“ Yours, truly,  
“ VINCENT MONTRAVEN.”

The third was from a well-born and well-bred foreigner, who gently hinted, “ that there were, among the various affairs of life, some transactions which admitted of delay, and some which did not ; and that Sir Charles Otterborne was too much a man of the world, and too much a gentleman of honour, not to be aware that the settlement of the account between them was an affair of the latter description.”

Sir Charles had long been in the habit of ordering all his letters to be taken to him in his own private study ; so that no eye witnessed the feeling, a little approaching to dismay, with which he perused these dispatches.

For one moment he felt extremely well disposed to blow his brains out ; but in the next he recollectcd the proud strut with which Herbert's intended father-in-law had declared that it was his intention to pay down eighty thousand pounds of his daughter's fortune into the hands of her husband upon their wedding-day ; and then he felt that he might, at least, take his choice between this always-ready resource of blowing his brains out, and the disclosing his real situation to his son.

Perhaps it was his recollection of the “ canon 'gainst self-slaughter” which at once determined him to apply to his son in

preference ; and, that one short moment of struggle over, he once again assumed the aspect of one of the gayest-hearted creatures in existence. It really was quite pleasant to look at him ; and when, an hour or two after the arrival of these letters, he happened to meet his carpenter, Stokes, he could not resist the pleasure of saying to him, that he hoped he did not happen to have any very long job of work on hand at present, because he was going to make an alteration in some of the best bedrooms at the Manor-house.

" My son will be married within a week, at the furthest," said he, " and I shall take the opportunity of his being absent upon his wedding tour to get it done. I shall be very angry if I can't get even the painting and papering-work finished before he comes back again."

Not all this superabundant vivacity, however, prevented his attending punctually to the letters he had received. They were all answered by the next post; and all the answers were gay, even to playfulness. He told all his three correspondents that he had fully intended to be in town on the following Wednesday, when, as he flattered himself, they would have to congratulate him on the marriage of his son with one of the richest heiresses in England.

These letters were received and answered by Sir Charles Otterborne, on the same day that William Price received from his father the cheque which was to pay his post-horses to Gretna Green.

When the high-spirited baronet rose from his early breakfast-table on the following morning, he felt himself so particularly alert, that he determined upon walking over to the Lodge, in order to pay his intended daughter-in-law a visit, and also for the purpose of asking Mrs. Steyton, in confidence, whether the Tuesday following was not to be, at last, finally named as the " happy day."

Had Sir Charles only waited about ten minutes longer, before he set out upon this eventful walk, he never would have set out upon it at all, for his son would by that time have told him, that the marriage he was so fondly anticipating could certainly not take place immediately, inasmuch as he himself intended to go abroad for a few weeks, before it was finally settled.

But so it was not to be ; for when Herbert reached his father's study—where, as was usual with him, he had breakfasted alone—he found that he had already gone out. This accident was an important one to Herbert for it prevented his

taking his intended trip to Belgium ; whether eventually it made any important difference in what befel his father, may be doubtful ; but the day was altogether the most eventful one probably which had ever occurred in the peaceful village of Weldon.

On reaching the gates of the padlock which surrounded the dwelling of Mr. Steyton, Sir Charles was struck by perceiving a terrified-looking group of domestic servants, among whom were women as well as men, endeavouring by main force to make their master return to the house from which he looked as if he had made his escape by violence ; he was without his hat, his hair was strangely disordered, as if he had been removing a portion of it by tearing it off—and, clenched firmly in his right hand, he carried a pistol.

“Stand off!—stand off!” he screamed in the loudest key that his voice could reach ; “I’ll blow out the brains of the first man, or woman either, that stops me.”

Yet still he found it difficult to advance ; for his faithful domestics of both sexes, though they did not venture to face him, impeded his onward progress very effectually by hanging upon the skirts of his coat behind.

As soon as the poor gentleman had recovered sufficient composure to recognise Sir Charles, his whole aspect changed. He no longer attempted to push forward, but seizing the baronet with his left arm, while he continued to grasp the pistol in his right, he said, “For Heaven’s sake, Sir Charles, tell me all you know ! You have lost her as well as I, if she has gone—and I have never told you yet one-half of what I intended to give her ! Who is it she has gone off with ? It is not your own son, after all—is it ? I would be in a towering passion with ‘em both if it was—but yet I’d bless the day that ever they did it.”

“Did what, Mr. Steyton ?” demanded the half-frightened, and greatly-puzzled Sir Charles. “Did what, Sir ? Why should they run off, together ?”

“Somebody has run off with her !” returned Mr. Steyton. “I was always sure it would turn out so ; I always said it, and that was the reason, I can tell you, why I snapped so greedily at your son,—though I don’t believe he’ll ever have a thousand a year in the world to help himself. But he could have made her my lady, at any rate,—and there would have been some comfort in that. But, who has got her now ? Can you tell me that ?”

“Why do you suppose that any one has got her, my good

Sir ? " said Sir Charles ; who, while he endeavoured to conceal his merriment at the grotesque appearance of the group before him, felt not the least alarm from the wild and improbable statement of his vehement neighbour ; his comfortable assurance that the elopement which he talked of was impossible, rendering it quite impossible also that he could share his suspicions.

" How do I know that anyone has got her ? " returned Mr. Steyton. " Why, you don't suppose that she has run away by herself, do you ? "

" But, who is it that says she has run away ? " persisted the incredulous Sir Charles. " Did any of you see her run off ? " he added, turning to the group of servants.

In reply to this direct appeal there was a universal " No, Sir Charles ; " upon hearing which, Mr. Steyton first seemed inclined to level his pistol at the whole party ; and then he let it fall upon the ground.

" What the devil, then, have you been telling me such lies for ? " said he, looking almost as angry at their denial of the news, as he had been at their assertion of it.

" I only said, Sir, " said one, " that Minny thought her young lady must have run off, because she had gone quite early out of her room, and had left all her things lying about at sixes and sevens."

" I only repeated what I heard the housemaid say, " said another. " If you please, Sir, it was the kitchenmaid told me, " said a third.

" But Tom, the gardener's boy, now says that he saw Miss Emily walking along, quite quietly, by her own self, more than an hour ago, along the London road, " added a fourth.

" Then, who was it that said she had run off ? " demanded the somewhat pacified Mr. Steyton.

" Please, Sir, it was your own self, " said one of the grooms.

" Well done, Steyton ! —that's capital ! " cried Sir Charles, laughing very heartily ; " all that I can make out is that our dear Emily thought she should like an early walk this fine morning, and that she took the liberty of setting out, without asking Minny's leave, and without folding up her nightcap ; and that is what they call leaving her things at sixes and sevens ! "

" Where is Minny ? " vociferated Mr. Steyton. " That girl shall go ! I will not be plagued with such a fool in the house, —her mistress is quite enough for one to manage. I think they are all fools, or mad, or drunk, or something ; and your

son, Sir Charles, among the rest, now I think of it. What did he mean, I wonder, by writing such a queer letter as he did, saying he was going abroad for a little while? Is he gone abroad, Sir Charles?"

"Just about as much as your daughter is run off," replied Sir Charles, laughing. "Nay, they may be gone together for anything I know."

"Then he is not gone abroad?" said Mr. Steyton, with a look of newly-awakened intelligence. "And now I remember," he added, "Emily laughed ready to kill herself when she talked about it! I'll bet a guinea they have had some lovers' quarrel, Sir Charles. Eh!—don't you think I'm right?" said the greatly comforted old gentleman, perfectly convinced that his daughter would be at home again in a few minutes, and perhaps bring her affianced Herbert with her, in spite of himself, and all his jealous fancies.

And, in truth, there really did appear many more substantial reasons for believing in this termination of the adventure, than in any other. In the first place the repentant Herbert Otterborne had evidently changed his mind about going abroad, as his father would otherwise most certainly have heard of it. And in the next place, who was there, excepting Herbert himself, for Emily to run away with? "If I can be certain of anything," thought he, "I may, at least, be certain that she is not eloped with Stephen Cornington, for I never saw downright horror and hatred if I did not see it in her countenance, when she talked of him."

And this was decidedly a great comfort.

In short, before Sir Charles Otterborne left the lodge, the choleric master of it had completely recovered his tranquillity, and actually set off in the happiest frame of mind imaginable to take a stroll along the London road, in the hope of meeting his daughter.

Sir Charles, however, had not, as he complacently told himself, made his visit for nothing; for he obtained a very solemn promise from Mr. Steyton that the marriage of their son and daughter should positively take place on the following Tuesday.

"We have given them quite time enough for all their fancies and fooleries," observed Mr. Steyton, very sagaciously; "and I don't intend to allow them any more."

"And upon my honour, Sir, I think you are quite right," was the reply of Sir Charles: "and I presume," he added, "that w

need make no further mystery about the day. You have no wish to keep it secret, have you, Mr. Steyton?"

"Secret, Sir Charles? No, faith! I mean that the wedding shall be in the face of all the world, and I don't care how soon all the world knows it."

"In that case, I suppose, I had better tell Price at once that we *have*, at last, really fixed the day," said Sir Charles, as he walked away.

"Yes, Sir Charles, I wish you would," replied Mr. Steyton,—"that is to say, if you happen to see him. But you need not go out of your way to do it; I dare say Emily will be writing to Louisa about it, before the day's over."

Sir Charles, however, felt no inclination to profit by this polite proposal for saving him trouble, for it seemed as if he were seized with a perfect mania for making visits among high and low. In his way to the Grange, where he intended to bestow one of his morning calls, he very good-humouredly stepped in for a few minutes at the workshop of Mr. Stokes, and mentioned to him, in an off-hand accidental sort of manner, that the wedding was fixed for Tuesday next. But the intelligence would have probably produced more effect upon the anxious carpenter had not Minny just left him, after giving it as her decided opinion that Miss Emily had not set off a walking by herself at that queer hour of the morning for nothing; though who could be her lover, if she had one, it was not easy to say,—for Minny happened to know that it certainly was *not* Mr. Stephen Cornington. And there was also another point on which Minny felt quite certain, and had told her father so; namely, that let it be whom it would, it was *not* Squire Otterborne: so that, on the whole, Sir Charles' condescending visit to the carpenter was not of any great utility.

From the workshop of Mr. Stokes, the baronet wandered on to the Grange, and found Mr. Mathews basking in the sun upon the same bench with Mr. King. He announced to them both the interesting news that next Tuesday had been at length fixed upon as the wedding-day.

Mr. King received the intelligence with a great deal of kind neighbourly interest, very cordially wishing the baronet joy, and declaring that they would make the handsomest couple in the county.

But it was quite in vain that the usually polite and observant Mr. Mathews endeavoured to look Sir Charles Otterborne in the face, and wish him joy, as civilly as Mr. King had done.

But the thing was impossible. His brilliant grandson had been amusing him about an hour before with rather a long description of all that he meant to do as soon as he returned from Scotland with Emily ; a conversation which would have been, if possible, still more delightful than it really was, had not the young man taken that opportunity of informing him that he found it would be absolutely necessary for him to go to London for a few days previous to the elopement.

"In the first place, Sir," he said, "the whole scheme would be blown to the devil if I attempted to make any preparations here. Everything must be done in London. Let me alone, Sir," he added ; "I know what I am about, and everything will go right, you may depend upon it."

So Mr. Mathews did depend upon it ; and Mr. Stephen Cornington had, in fact, set off for London that very morning by the early train.

It was no great wonder, therefore, if Mr. Mathews found himself so much inclined to laugh, upon hearing this very grave, but very erroneous, statement from Sir Charles, as to render him perfectly incapable of replying to him with becoming gravity. The peculiarity of his manner, however, escaped the notice of Sir Charles ; who was, in fact, too much interested and excited himself by the news he came to communicate, to permit his being very observant of the manner in which it was received.

He left his kind compliments, however, for Mrs. Mathews, and begged that she might be given to understand that he had called at the Grange on purpose to give her the earliest intelligence that the important day was finally fixed for *Tuesday next*.

Poor Mr. Mathews strove hard to behave as well as he possibly could under the circumstances ; but there was something so irresistibly comic in wishing a gentleman joy of having obtained a wealthy heiress as the wife of his son, which wealthy heiress was about to elope in a few hours with his own grandson, that had it not been for the assistance of the large Bandana handkerchief, with which from time to time he concealed his features, Sir Charles must have found out the very extraordinary state of his mind.

The visit, however, did not last long, and very heartily glad was the merry Mr. Mathews when it was over.

The last of the visits which Sir Charles proposed to pay that morning was to the Rectory ; and here, at least, his news was

rcceived with the most perfect good breeding and decorum. Mrs. Price, as usual, looked the very perfection of genteel propriety ; Louisa certainly looked very happy, but she looked very tranquil too ; and as to the reverend rector himself, it must have been a very sharp-sighted person indeed, who could have discovered anything out of the common way in his demeanour.

" Well, neighbour Price," began the facetious Sir Charles, in his kindest tone of familiarity, " had you not begun to think that our wedding was to be no wedding at all ? "

" How so, Sir Charles ? " said the rector, with a look as unmeaning as it was in his power to make it.

" How so, man !—why, by reason of no day being fixed for it," returned the baronet.

" Oh ! as to that, Sir Charles, the fixing the day is no very difficult job."

" You are quite right, there, my good friend, for it did not take us above half a minute to fix it at last. I have just come from Steyton's, and he commissioned me, as I was coming this way, to tell you that next Tuesday is the day we have fixed upon."

" Really !" said Mrs. Price,—who truly was as innocent of the Scotch gallop her son was upon, as a new-born babe. " Really ! Well, Sir Charles, that is quite right. Tuesday is marrying-day, I believe ? "

" And you are to be bridesmaid, Miss Louisa ; but that, I dare-say, you know already. Emily, I believe, fixed upon you for that office almost as soon as the offer was made ; and I daresay, if the truth were told, the dress is not very far from being ready," said Sir Charles, looking at her with a vast deal of merry intelligence.

Miss Louisa Price blushed and smiled, and hung down her head, but said nothing.

" And now," he resumed, " I think I must go home, and talk a little to her ladyship about it. If you will believe me, Price, I don't know at this moment, near as the day is, whether she means being present at the ceremony or not. However, there is still time enough to settle all that. Good morning to you all ! I must be off, for there are fifty things still that I want to say to Herbert. I intend to let them stay abroad just as long as they like ; and when they come back, I mean that they shall have the whole right wing of the Manor-house fitted up for them.

And they may receive and give dinners,

and do everything they like there. When there is plenty of money, you know, everything is easy. And having said this, he nodded gaily to the family-party and took his leave.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

IT was about three hours after Sir Charles had left the carpenter's shop, before his visits and his pleasant lingering walk brought him within sight of his own lodge-gates on his return.

As he approached the lodge, he perceived a group of three men standing idly together just outside the gate, within the shadow of one of his own noble oaks, which threw its arms over the park paling half across the public road. He was aware that they perceived his approach, and his aristocratic feelings were rather offended by their not moving off when they saw him,—for though there was certainly quite enough room for him to pass, they nevertheless stood in some degree between him and his own gate.

At length, however, they did move, and moved altogether,—but it was not out of his way, but directly towards him.

“Beg your pardon, Sir Charles,” said the foremost of the three, slightly touching his hat, “but, I’m sorry to say I have got a bit of a retainer against you, Sir, and if the money can’t be paid down, you must please to come with me.”

Sir Charles for a moment looked vehemently excited, and vehemently red; but he quickly recovered his self-command, and said, without any appearance of irritation, but with something like a sneer on his lips, “Certainly, my good fellow, I must go with you, if the gentry who have employed you are so hard-pressed that they cannot wait a few days longer for their money.”

“They can’t, no how, Sir Charles,” returned the official.

“At any rate they are acting just now with great folly, as well as with great incivility,” returned the prisoner. “However, I am quite ready to go with you.”

But he bit his nether lip almost through as he pronounced the words.

"Sir Charles will choose to have out the carriage, I suppose?" said one of the other men.

"Why, yes,—I shall prefer it, in preference to walking to the county jail in your company," said the unfortunate debtor.

"Shall I step forward to order it, Sir Charles?" said one of the men.

"Just as you please," was the reply; "but I shall step forward myself, also. I cannot leave my house without taking a portmanteau and dressing-case with me."

"Well, Sir Charles, for the honour of the family, I will not contradict you; but it is being rather more obliging than I have any right to be."

The baronet said nothing in reply, but strode onward towards the house. Instead of approaching the principal entrance, however, he turned off towards a side door that opened upon a small hall, which led to his study. This door was already open, and one of his own servants was standing at it.

It was instantly evident, from the first glance of this man's eye, that he recognised the persons by whom his master was accompanied,—and, moreover, that he understood their errand.

"I shall want you immediately to take a note for me to Weldon Lodge, William," said Sir Charles, addressing him; and then, with a rapid step, he passed on to his study, followed by the three unwelcome visitors, as well as by his own servant.

Sir Charles immediately sat down at his desk, and began writing a letter.

"Shall I order the carriage to come round, Sir Charles?" said the man in authority.

"If it is a part of your duty, pray do it," replied Sir Charles, making him a sort of comic bow. "And now I think of it," he continued, "you may not only order it, but you may order it to carry my note to Mr. Steyton. He will, I have no doubt, return with it, and by that means this very foolish business will be the more speedily brought to a conclusion."

The three officials held a consultation together upon the propriety of complying with this proposal.

"It is a pity that you did not bring a few more hands with you," said Sir Charles, looking at them with unutterable contempt. "Are you afraid that if you allow me too much time, I shall vanish away from you? Your employer has chosen his time oddly enough. But I am not going to run away, —and even if I made the attempt, I should have but a poor chance with three such brave fellows to run after me."

The note he had been writing was finished, folded, sealed, and directed with great rapidity; and he now delivered it to William, telling him to go with the carriage as soon as it was ready, and deliver it with his own hand to Mr. Steyton, with as little delay as possible. The man left the room instantly, and the carriage wheels were in the next moment heard rolling over the gravel. Neither was any time lost on its return,—for almost before it could be expected, the same sound was heard again.

Sir Charles had seated himself during the interval in his usual arm-chair, while the three men stood grouped together, awkwardly enough, just within the door. To judge from the serenity of his countenance, it really seemed as if the master of the mansion had actually forgotten the presence of his unwelcome guests, for he was employing himself with great seeming composure in reading over again the three letters from his London correspondents, which were given in the last chapter; nay, more, he smiled as he replaced them in his desk; and then, during the short interval which remained before the return of the carriage, he took up the newspaper of the morning, and placing himself in a very comfortable attitude, appeared to read it with great attention.

His letter to Mr. Steyton had contained only a few lines, which ran thus:—

“MY DEAR STEYTON,—A very stupid mistake on the part of my managing man, about the payment of a bill which I thought wanted correction, has produced this morning the agreeable vagary of an arrest. I shall be much obliged by your lending me your name as security for a day or two, in which time I shall be perfectly well able to get it settled. . . . And I am sure you will agree with me that your Emily’s father-in-law must not come forth from a spunging-house, in order to be present at her wedding.

“Yours most faithfully,  
“CHARLES OTTERBORNE.”

The answer to it was not much longer. It was thus worded:—

“SIR CHARLES,—Did matters stand between us as they once did, and as you seem to fancy they do still, I might think your demand upon me rather less unreasonable than it appears at

present. I have no wish to quarrel with any of your family, but neither have I any wish to stand security for them. Since you called here we have found a letter in my daughter Emily's work-box, informing me, that in order to get rid of all her other admirers, she has eloped with Mr. William Price. I cannot help feeling that it is possible she might have done worse.

"Yours,

"THOMAS STEYTON."

The perusal of this note produced the first very strong symptom of emotion which Sir Charles had yet manifested; he turned deadly pale, and for a moment his eyes were closed, and something like a shudder seemed to pass through his whole frame. But he very speedily roused himself, and turning to the three men who appeared to be expecting the result of the embassy, he said, with more civility than he had previously used towards them, "I am sorry to have kept you waiting for nothing. It does not suit Mr. Steyton, it seems, to afford me the assistance I asked for. I must therefore go with you. Would you like to take any refreshment, while my servant is putting up a few necessaries?"

"No, Sir Charles, thank you kindly, but we'll bide as we be." And a something like a look of intelligence which was exchanged between the speaker and his companions, suggested the idea of a watch and ward that was not to give way even before the famous home-brewed ale of Manor-house.

"Nay, my good fellows," said the baronet with a sort of melancholy smile, "you need not be afraid that I should run away from you. Such an attempt might give you a little more trouble, but it could not possibly do me any good. I must get through this business as well as I can, but it won't be by running away."

He then rang the bell—and William, who had left the room after delivering Mr. Steyton's note, answered it.

"It is necessary that I should go with these persons, William," said he, in a quiet, though somewhat of a stern manner; "but I believe that they will not object to wait for a few minutes longer while you put up in one of the small portmanteaus a few necessaries for me. You may bring all the things in here if you will, and then I shall see myself what I shall most want."

This command met with no opposition from the men in whose custody he was now placed, and his servant left the room to obey his orders.

In a very few minutes he returned bringing linen, and various other commodities in his arms. "More than enough, more than enough, William!" exclaimed Sir Charles, giving a cursory glance to the various articles with which the man covered the table and chairs. "And now then for the small portmanteau. You will find two or three in there," he added, pointing to the half-open door of a small room, or almost closet, which was the receptacle of boots, spurs, riding-whips, and masculine gear of various kinds.

The man obeyed, and brought forth a small portmanteau.

"Will this do, Sir Charles?" said his servant.

"Yes, yes! it will do very well, I daresay. Put everything in for me, will you?" was the reply of his master.

But long before "everything" was put in, it became evident that there was not room enough to contain all that was required. "There are half a dozen of them of different sizes in there!" exclaimed Sir Charles, fretfully. "Bring out another, do."

And another, considerably longer, was then brought, and the packing process recommenced. But when it seemed to be very nearly completed, Sir Charles discerned that the key was wanting. William declared that the key was in the lock when he brought it out. "Then you have dropped it since!" cried Sir Charles, his temper seeming to give way under these minor vexations. "By heaven! all this preparation is worse than the thing itself. Look for the key on the carpet, can't you?"

And both master and man groped under the chairs, and tables—the three officials obligingly joining in the hunt.

During the minute or two that this lasted, Sir Charles, in seeking the lost key, had moved from the spot where he had stood when the packing began, and was now pushing about a chair or two which stood close beside the closet-door; and in the next moment he had slipped through this closet-door himself, which was rapidly and vehemently closed, and almost at the same moment it was both locked and bolted very audibly within.

"Is there any outlet from that room?" demanded the unfortunate men who had it in charge to arrest Sir Charles Otterborne.

"No!" replied William, you need not frighten yourself about his getting out that way, for" But before the consolatory assurance could be fully uttered, they were made very fearfully to understand that there might be more ways than one h̄v

which an arrested debtor might make his escape, for the report of a pistol was heard so close beside them, that each man looked at his neighbour as if he expected to see him fall.

Of course not a moment was lost in breaking open the door ; but the fatal work had been performed by no weak or wavering hand. The skull had been literally shattered to atoms, and the death which followed, must have been instantaneous.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

THAT her son had not left the house and the kingdom, was the first consolatory circumstance which suggested itself to the terrified Lady Otterborne, when the frightful catastrophe was made known to her. The report of the pistol had startled her, but greatly less than it would have done had she been better acquainted with the desperate state of her husband's affairs.

But having a sort of quiet old-fashioned persuasion that thirty thousand pounds was a large sum, and well knowing that her dissolute husband had a perfectly unchecked control over the legacy to that amount which had so unexpectedly come to her, she perfectly comprehended why, and how it was that Sir Charles had managed to be so much in London, although she had steadily refused to have a house there ; but it certainly had never occurred to her that the uncontrolled possession of this sum had not sufficed to keep her unprincipled husband out of debt, and beyond the danger of a catastrophe so appalling as the sound of that pistol shot announced.

It was the entrance of her maid therefore, looking herself as pale as a corpse, that first gave a fatal shape to the vague feeling of terror which that sound produced.

Whenever some decidedly preponderating affection has possession of us, we are all apt, I believe, to suffer every vague alarm to point in that direction. Had Lady Otterborne been the mother of many children, her first thought would probably have been that some dreadful accident had befallen some among them ; but now, on seeing the ghostly face of her attendant, the first sound she uttered was the name of "Herbert !" "No !

my lady, no!" cried the woman with a rapidity of utterance, and an inflexion of voice which showed plainly enough her consciousness that this "No" was the most comforting word she could utter, "No! my lady, no! 'tis Sir Charles!"

Yet still the idea of an accident was in her head, and it was not till she had looked fixedly in the face of her old servant for a moment, that the idea of the horrible truth suggested itself.

And then if the countenance of the servant was eloquent, that of the mistress was not less so.

"Yes, my lady!" was Morris's reply to that look, and she put a bottle of salts into her mistress's hand as she uttered it.

If it be a sin to feel relieved when a lesser horror takes place of a greater, Lady Otterborne was guilty of that sin; and when, the moment afterwards, her terrified son rushed into the room, and threw his arms round her while he knelt silently at her feet, she was for the moment conscious of no feeling but that of gratitude to Heaven for the unspeakable blessing of seeing him there.

All the incidents which immediately followed this frightful event were exactly what it might be expected they would be. The whole neighbourhood were thrown into a state of great excitement, chiefly, of course, by the terrible death of Sir Charles, but partly, also, by the very unexpected termination of the beautiful Emily's adventures.

"I should about as soon have thought," said Mr. Cuthbridge, when talking the matter over with Mrs. Mathews, "I should about as soon have thought of the young lady's eloping with a wood pigeon, as with the sleek, and softly cooing William Price."

But to Mrs. Mathews this unexpected selection on the part of the heiress was the occasion of very great satisfaction. First, as it put an end at once and for ever to all her fears lest, after all, her dearly beloved Herbert Otterborne should be her mate; and, secondly, as it served to convince her, and, after a little discussion, her friend the priest likewise, that all her suspicions respecting the falsehood of Stephen Cornington's confession, were well founded.

But the excitement of the neighbourhood on both those subjects faded away by degrees, as all neighbourly excitements do fade, and then, as the loving invitation of the happy bride to her parents that they should follow her to that most beautiful of all places, PARIS, was joyfully and immediately accepted, the

interior of the Manor-house was the only scene very perceptibly changed by what had happened.

But there the change was great indeed.

It was, perhaps, rather fortunate both for mother and son that there were so many important matters of business to be discussed, and settled between them, for it seemed to explain the reason for their having so little time and leisure to discuss all the horrible circumstances which had attended the event which had wrought this change.

It was utterly impossible that they should not both feel that they were relieved from all that had made life painful ; but, unbounded as was the love and confidence between them, neither of them could have found the bad courage to confess that they knew to what their very unwonted feeling of happiness was to be attributed.

The task of looking over his father's papers of course devolved on Herbert, and the performing this, explained only too clearly the immediate causes which had led to the desperate act.

The sharp dunning of his London friends was fully enough, in conjunction with Emily Steyton's elopement, to explain it, and it was for this reason that Herbert, and very wisely too, thought it better to remove all wearying and idle conjecture from the mind of his mother, by making her at once comprehend the nature of the claims which he had found too urgent, and too burdensome to endure.

And most thankful certainly did they both feel that the tremendous sacrifice which poor Herbert had consented to make in the hope of saving *her* from suffering, had been so happily escaped ; for it was clearly evident that it would not have insured its object had it been made.

In short, the mother and son, in the deep retirement which decorum, as well as their own feelings dictated, could not be insensible to the many new sources of enjoyment which were opening before them ; nor was it the least of these that they could now converse together truly, and perfectly without restraint ; for we may talk of sorrows and sufferings that *have been*, with friends most tenderly beloved, without being checked by any fear of increasing suffering ; whereas many a loving heart withholds its confidence, from the fear that by confessing unhappiness it may cause it.

All this was keenly felt and fully appreciated on both sides ; and although they neither of them said it, they both felt that

they had never been so thoroughly happy in each other's society before.

Yet with all this there were some things in their situation which most people would have considered as heavy drawbacks to felicity, and most assuredly they were so.

A strict examination into the real condition of the estate showed plainly enough that for years past the only objects of Sir Charles had been to get ready money from every available source within his reach, and to leave everything that he owed as long unpaid as possible.

Fortunately, a considerable portion of the property, especially that immediately round the house, was still entailed ; but all that it was possible to sell he had sold, and all that he could mortgage, he had mortgaged.

Of Lady Otterborne's noble legacy not a single shilling remained, and scarcely a trace could be found of any portion of it having been employed to liquidate the heavy claims upon the property which had existed when it came to her.

On the other hand, his betting-books, which were the only accounts kept with regularity, showed plainly enough where by far the greater part of the money had gone. It had indeed furnished funds for the three last years of Herbert's education ; and, but for this, not a trace would have been left either to the mother or son that such a legacy had ever been left, or had ever been paid.

The most painful part of this examination consisted of the discovery made by it of the many still unpaid bills of long standing due to very nearly every tradesman with whom they had been in the habit of dealing, both in town and country ; and as Sir Charles had been constantly in the habit of bribing his tenants to pay their rents a little before they were due, by allowing them exorbitant interest for the accommodation, his son had the vexation of finding that a considerable part of the only fund he had to look to for even the partial payment of the tradesmen's bills, which he considered himself bound in honour to pay, had been already forestalled.

Had the intercourse between the mother and son been less perfectly confidential, Herbert would have endeavoured to have kept Lady Otterborne in ignorance of this painful discovery ; but they had set to work so completely together, in order to make themselves acquainted with the real condition of their affairs, that such concealment was no longer possible. And a real blessing was it to both that it was not so ; for kindly

intended as such concealment would have been, its ultimate effect could only have been injurious.

Well as Herbert thought he knew his mother, he speedily discovered that he had never done her justice. The utter impossibility of her doing any good by interfering with her unprincipled husband's affairs during his lifetime, had long ago made her abandon the attempt, so that not even her son had any idea that she possessed the sort of steady courage which she now evinced in the painful task on which they were engaged. And most injurious to both would it have been had any species of concealment existed on either side. It soon became evident that if they ever hoped to pay the many heavy claims upon them which both were equally desirous should be paid, although no legal obligation rested upon them for the debts contracted by Sir Charles, it must be done by at once completely breaking up their present establishment. Horses, dogs, carriages, hothouses, gardens, and even the noble herd of deer in the park, must all be parted with.

If this were done, and done at once, it was tolerably evident that in a little more than seven years the debts might be all paid, and an important portion of the property upon which there was a mortgage (though of rather doubtful legal authority) redeemed.

When their calculations had brought them to this conclusion, each looked in the face of the other to discover whether the result was better or worse than had been anticipated; and this look was well understood by both.

"I am thankful that it is no worse!" exclaimed Lady Otterborne, joyfully.

"But how will you bear all these privations, my dear, dear mother?" replied her son, looking anxiously in her pale and delicate face.

"If you can bear a life of steady economy and self-denial for years, my dear young son," she replied, "it will be strange indeed if something of the same sort should be too difficult for me. Remember, my Herbert, that much that must be felt as privation at your age, is rather a release from fatigue at mine. I shall have no carriage, and therefore I shall pay no more visits; and I have long been growing so lazy that this will be a positive relief to me. But you, Herbert? We positively must keep one horse, only one little scrubby pony for my dear long-descended baronet to ride upon. Our man-of-all-work, who must milk our cow, you know, and work in the garden,

may look after such a nag as that. And I know you can saddle it, and bridle it yourself, my dear boy."

This was said so gaily, so much more gaily than any words which he had heard pronounced by his mother's sweet voice for years, that Herbert at once and for ever felt that it was not now that she was entering upon a life of privation.

He from that moment anticipated recovered health and recovered spirits for her; and from that moment the up-hill tedious work of economy became to him less a task than a pastime.

Of his father's debts of honour he knew little, and cared less; but with a stedfast will, and a courage not likely to fail, he determined by degrees to regale the precious companion who seemed restored to him by the sight of a receipt for every one of the long bills which had been so painfully collected round them.

Did his mother understand the happy look with which he had listened to her as she proposed, as a great indulgence, that he should keep one little pony, on the express condition that he should saddle and bridle it himself?

Perhaps, in part, she did. But it was impossible that she could fully comprehend in how bright a light he saw the long perspective of years, during which he was doomed to play the part of steward, bailiff, gamekeeper, and gardener on his own dilapidated estate; and that of groom of the chambers, butler, footman, groom, and general helper of all work in his own noble mansion.

It was not that he intended to make a picturesque comedy of it; on the contrary, he very fully understood the grave reality of the task they had set themselves to perform; and though he might scarcely have had sufficient elasticity of spirit to set about it with so cheerful a spirit had his mother looked at him with the same melancholy glance that he had been used to see when his marriage with the beautiful heiress had been the theme, he would in no case have been likely to blunder as to the necessity of being very solemnly in earnest in the work they had determined to undertake.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE first visit made by Sir Herbert Otterborne after the death of his father was to Mrs. Mathews. It would probably have been so even if his mother had expressed no wish on the subject; for there was not a single individual among his neighbours, whether male or female, young or old, in whose unchangeable friendship the young man felt so firm a confidence as in hers.

Though it is a very certain fact that he never in his life felt himself less inclined to bewail his destiny, yet it is equally a certain fact that few young men have ever appeared to be much more unfortunate than he did at this period of his existence.

A very wealthy and very beautiful girl, to whom he was on the very eve of being united, had eloped with another man.

His father had stamped a bad renown upon his honourable name, by first squandering an ample fortune, till he had made himself utterly insolvent, and then withdrawing himself from all responsibilities by blowing his brains out; whilst he himself, poor youth, found himself in possession of an old title and an honourable name, a splendid mansion, and large rent-roll, yet actually without the means of affording such a home to his mother, in point of attendance and general accommodation, as the apothecary of the parish could well afford to his.

All this was very sad, as well as very true; and it was therefore very natural, that the first effort made by Herbert towards appearing again before the eyes of his neighbours, should be made in the direction where he felt most certain of meeting with the sort of sympathy that his heart required.

Moreover, his mother was anxious to see Mrs. Mathews again. She fancied that she had not manifested all the gratitude which she ought to have done for the friendly, though mysterious, visit which she had received from her; and, moreover, Lady Otterborne was longing to see her little Janet again. To the Grange, therefore, was the first visit of Sir Herbert paid; and with the same absence of all ceremony as heretofore, he made his way to the den, without even ringing the bell at the house door, for the weather was fine, and the door stood open, and poor Herbert at that moment felt that he had rather meet Mrs. Mathews unannounced than even his old friend Sally.

Had he not been certain beforehand of meeting exactly the sort of sympathy he wished for, he would have felt that he had done so by the first look of his old friend's eye, and the first accents of her voice. Both the one and the other were simple and true, and for that reason there was no danger of their losing their way before they reached his heart.

"How is your mother, my dear Herbert?" were the first words she said, after the short but cordial expression of her gratitude for his coming to her.

"Shall I tell her exactly how she is?" was a question which Herbert instantly asked himself; and though, like the immortal question in the "Critic," it was a question he had never asked before, he gave himself a very prompt and decided answer in the affirmative.

And great was the wisdom of this decision; and he instantly felt the wisdom of it, as he marked the interest and the admiration which every word he spoke seemed to inspire.

"I am proud of myself, my dear Herbert," said Mrs. Mathews; "I had no right to fancy I knew Lady Otterborne as well as I thought I did know her; but every word you speak convinces me that I made no mistake. Noble, noble Lady Otterborne! . . . Herbert! You have a beautiful career before you! Shall you be very much startled, my good friend, if you were to see her grow young again? How beautiful she was a very few years ago! And I shall be disappointed if I do not see her pretty nearly as handsome as ever."

This was certainly very plain speaking, and yet there was so much deep truth of feeling in it, that it was utterly impossible it could be offensive. It was not a subject that could be discussed, but it was one upon which such perfect sympathy as was manifested by Mrs. Mathews could not fail of being welcome.

"And she will really let me come to her," said she "—and she will really let me bring my little Janet too? The child is absolutely pining to see her."

"And is Miss Anderson quite well?" rejoined Herbert quietly. "It is a long time since we last met."

"Long! Everything seems long that has happened lately! And yet Heaven knows we cannot say of anything that has happened that it has any resemblance to a twice-told tale! The elopement of your *fiancée*, for instance, my dear Sir Herbert! That was altogether most perfectly original,—was it not?"

"At any rate it was most perfectly unexpected," he replied,

laughing. "But do you not think my philosophy under it is quite as original as the event itself?" he added.

"No," was her reply. "For that I was perfectly well prepared. How long, do you think, has her tender heart preferred Mr. William Price to all other men?"

"A difficult question, my dear friend," was his reply. "But I assure you that I think she has chosen very well at last. I never in my life heard any harm of William Price, and I certainly never saw anything in him that was not amiable and kind-hearted. Will you forgive me if I say that I am very glad Mr. Mathews' grandson did not get her? I am very glad he is not your grandson instead; for in truth I dislike him extremely."

"You are a bold man to make such a confession to a grandmother," she replied, "or even to a grandmother-in-law."

"Is that correction correct?" said he, laughing.

"Perhaps not," said she; "but you are a bolder man still, to refer to such delicate family secrets. I have a thousand blessings, my dear, Sir Herbert, that I ought to be, and am thankful for, one of which is that you have escaped marrying the beautiful heiress. But I have my trials too, as the grumblers say, and the worst of them is the having to associate with a thing I like so little as Mr. Stephen Cornington."

"I confess I do not like him," replied Herbert. "He puzzled me, and I do not like to be puzzled, unless it be by a professional juggler. I cannot make him out, Mrs. Mathews. He dances, and sings, and plays billiards, and talks French like a native. But"—and there he stopped.

"But what, Sir Herbert?" said Mrs. Mathews.

"I was going to add,—only it seems almost impertinent, considering that this honoured house is his residence; but I was going to add that I very much doubt his having been reared among gentlemen."

"The severity of that remark, my good friend, rests rather upon the place whence he came than upon that where he now is," said she. "But tell me seriously, my young old friend, do you really suspect me of having mistaken Master Stephen Cornington for a gentleman?"

"No, no, no!" he replied, laughing; "if I had, I should not have hinted at my own suspicions on the subject, you may depend upon it."

"That sounds very like the truth, and so I will accept it, by way of an apology," said she.

"When may I tell my mother that you will come to her?" said Sir Herbert, rising.

"Name the day and hour yourself," replied Mrs. Mathews, "and you may depend upon it that both Janet and I will be punctual."

"To-morrow be it then, my dear kind friend," said the young man with a very perceptible augmentation of colour. "To-morrow, about the same hour that I came to you to-day. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly," was the reply, and so they parted, Sir Herbert perhaps a little disappointed at not having seen Janet, but well pleased and greatly comforted at having put their future intercourse so pleasantly *en traine*.

Poor Mr. Mathews, meanwhile, though he had heard of the dismal death of his old acquaintance with great fortitude, which was, to say the truth, pretty generally the case throughout the parish, was not without his own share in the disappointments to which the unexpected elopement of the beautiful Emily had given birth.

It certainly was not quite so terrible a business to him as it had been to his neighbour Sir Charles, because a hundred pounds, though a great deal too much to be wantonly thrown away upon an unprofitable scheme, was not a loss likely to make him blow his brains out.

Nevertheless Mr. Mathews was a good deal vexed, and greatly as he admired, and devotedly as he was attached to his grandson, he had very serious thoughts of telling him when he returned from London that he must be more careful for the future, and not count his chickens so very decidedly before they were hatched. Nor was he altogether without some slight hope that this beloved grandson might restore to him at least a portion of the hundred pounds advanced for the purpose of running away with the heiress.

But all these hopes and intentions were at once knocked to atoms by the receipt of the following letter, signed with the name of Stephen Cornington, but written with so unsteady a hand as would have made it impossible to recognize the writing, if the document had not been signed :—

"MY BELOVED GRANDFATHER,—The tremendous shock I have received from hearing of the treacherous falsehood of my once adored Emily, has been too much for my fortitude—too much for my strength both of body and mind! I am now lying

dangerously ill at a small lodging which I took to save expense on my arrival in London. Heaven only knows what may be the final result of my present illness ! I suffer greatly, and I sometimes fear that I shall lose my reason. My poor head wanders so, that I could not, if my life depended upon it, recollect the name of the street where I am lodging ; but, if I die, you will hear of it, for I have written your name and address very distinctly in my pocket-book, and the people of the house will be sure to find it. But if it should please Heaven to give me strength to recover from this great calamity, I shall use my returning health for the purpose of once more embracing my dearest, dearest parent !

"One great source of suffering to me at this moment is the fear that the expenses of my illness may eat away the hundred pounds which you so generously bestowed upon me, alas ! for a far different purpose. Adieu then, my beloved grandfather ! If my life is spared, my only consolation for all I have suffered will be found in your tenderness. I think if I do live to return to you, that you will find me a good deal altered. I am looking much older than I did, and I could not help fancying as I got a glimpse at my own face in the glass yesterday, that my resemblance to you becomes more striking every day. God bless you, my beloved grandfather ! It is impossible for me to tell you more at present ; but the medical man who attends me says that in a very short time he shall be able to judge what the result of this illness may be. If an early death is indeed to be my fate, it would be a great and soothing consolation to me if I could die in your arms ; and this idea has taken such hold upon me that I have told my doctor to send an express for you if he should think my end approaching. If you should receive this, I know that you will hasten to me ; but if it should be otherwise, if my young life should not be thus prematurely cut short, be very sure that in that case I shall hasten to you ; for I am, and to my last sigh I ever shall be, your devotedly attached grandson,

"STEPHEN CORNINGTON."

Poor Mr. Mathews was very strongly affected by the perusal of this letter, and his first impulse was to set off immediately for London, but a moment's reflection convinced him that the attempt to find this beloved grandson with no more specific mode of describing him than by saying he was very like himself, was not likely to answer, or at least not without consider-

able delay; and the poor gentleman therefore, was obliged to submit to a very painful state of suspense; nor could he resist the temptation of asking for the consolation of sympathy from his wife, although he neither did nor could expect that she should share, or even understand the intense anxiety from which he was suffering. "She has never known what it was to be a parent!" thought he; "yet nevertheless I am sure she must pity me!"

And with this very natural hope he invited her, as soon as breakfast was over, to go with him for a few minutes into the drawing-room as he had some sad news that he wished to communicate. Mrs. Mathews instantly obeyed, and her husband confidentially put the melancholy letter he had received into her hands.

She read it with great decorum, and said, as she returned it to him, "You must not suffer yourself to be too much alarmed by this, Mr. Mathews. Young people are often very ill one day, you know, and quite well the next."

But Mrs. Mathews did not content herself by reading the letter once; she began it again at the first line, and again read it through very deliberately to the last.

"Poor young man!" she said, as she then returned it to her husband. "It really is very melancholy! Were you aware, Mr. Mathews, of his having been so strongly attached to Miss Steyton?"

"Oh dear, yes! my dear love," was the ready reply. "My poor Stephen has, I really believe, no secrets from his grandfather, and it is this sort of unbounded confidence on his part which has so much endeared him to me!"

"That is very natural, certainly," replied Mrs. Mathews. "I often thought he seemed to admire her very much, but I had no idea he was so deeply attached."

"You don't know Stephen as well as I do," replied Mr. Mathews, wiping his eyes. "His attachments are all deep; I have observed it from the very first, and this worthless girl had the wickedness to persuade him that she returned his affection. But it is now quite evident that she only did this as a means of concealing her real attachment. Her elopement with young Price shows plainly enough that she never really cared a farthing either for young Otterborne, or my poor Stephen. Take my word for it, she has fooled them both."

"But what does he mean about your giving him a hundred pounds, Mr. Mathews?" said she.

"Dear me, I quite forgot that he mentioned that, poor fellow! It was quite a mistake of mine, showing you that, my dear, so you must never take any notice of it, if you please. But the truth is, that she made him believe that she wanted to run away with him; and seeing how very much in love he was, my dear Mary, and knowing what a noble fortune she was to have, I could not bear that he should lose her for want of a hundred pounds. But I shall soon be able to save it again one way or another, so do not let us talk any more about that."

"You shall never hear of it again from me," she replied, in a tone of good humour that greatly comforted him; and truly conscious that his wife was not only a liberal-minded but very clever woman, he wisely determined to rest his thoughts upon her comfortable assurance that young people did very often recover from severe illnesses.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

THERE was certainly a considerable mixture of triumph in the tone of voice with which Mrs. Mathews addressed her friend the priest, when, in compliance with her special invitation, he paid her an early visit on the following morning—a visit so early as not to interfere with her promise of accompanying Janet to the Manor-house.

"Let your hair grow, Sir Priest!" she said; "and let me submit to the tonsure. All that fine perspicuity of mind that you were so eloquently describing to me the other day, as part and parcel of your profession, belongs to me, but not to you."

And, in reply to his entreaty that she would be pleased to explain her meaning, she said :

"I shall be exceedingly well pleased to explain it, though in doing so I too must make a confession; and whether you give me absolution or not, I shall at least have the satisfaction of proving to you that I am much better fitted than your reverence to receive confessions, or, at any rate, of comprehending them. Do you remember the very agitated state of mind in which you

appeared before me, when you fancied you had made a discovery very important to our friend, Herbert Otterborne?"

"Yes, certainly, I remember it," replied Mr. Cuthbridge; "and it is quite necessary that I should do so, in order to justify myself, either in your opinion or my own, for having made to you such a disclosure as I did."

"And what shall you think of the sagacity of an old lady who, notwithstanding your agitation and your solemnity, ventured in her heart to disbelieve every syllable of the confession which you *very nearly* thought ought to be more sacred than the honour and happiness of such a man as Herbert Otterborne?"

"You disbelieved it?" he exclaimed; "then, why did you not tell me so at the time?"

"Because I thought, whatever your reverence might do, that **NOTHING** ought to be put in competition with the honour and happiness of Herbert. There was at least a possibility that the confession you had listened to, was a true confession; and as I was therefore bound to act as if I believed it, it would not have been wisdom to begin by declaring my conviction that it was false. I, therefore, obeyed your behest, in the only essential part of it, namely, in preventing the *immediate* marriage of our friend Herbert; my conviction becoming stronger with every passing moment, that your villainous penitent had confessed a sin that had never been committed, because he shrewdly guessed that you would deem it your duty in some way or other to prevent the marriage of Otterborne with the heiress, who he fully intended to marry himself."

"And you have summoned me for the purpose of announcing that your suspicion was correct?" said Mr. Cuthbridge.

"Exactly so," was her reply.

"Will you go further? Will you tell me how you have discovered this?" said he.

"Most assuredly I will, and with very particular satisfaction, both to do honour to my own discernment, and to exonerate the bride of our worthy young neighbour, William Price, from the odium which this precious grandson has cast upon her."

Her narrative was a very short one; but so perfectly satisfactory, that, priest and Jesuit as he was, Mr. Cuthbridge declared he could find no flaw in it.

Having performed this act of justice, and enjoyed the pleasant triumph which accompanied it, Mrs. Mathews confessed that nothing but her impatience to do herself honour had induced her to request his calling upon her just then, as she had

promised to make her first visit to the widowed Lady Otterborne before the morning was over.

On receiving this hint, the librarian of Proctor Castle took his leave, a good deal amused at perceiving how much more skilful a confessor his old Protestant friend was, than himself.

The meeting between Lady Otterborne and Mrs. Mathews was a very happy one; and paradoxical as it may seem to say so, it would perhaps have been more unembarrassed in its enjoyment had the happiness of it been less sensibly felt on both sides. But the embarrassment soon went off, and the happiness remained.

That it was so, might be greatly attributed to the sort of resolute frankness with which Lady Otterborne at once alluded to her changed position.

"My dear son has told you how things stand with us, Mrs. Mathews," said she, as soon as they were fairly seated side by side upon the sofa. "It was my wish, as well as his, that he should do so. We shall certainly neither have the wish nor the power of concealing from any of our neighbours, the very notorious fact that we can no longer hold the station among them which we have been used to occupy. But this fact does not require any personal communication from us, in order to make it perfectly well known and understood. But with you the case is different. From babyhood to manhood, you have been one of Herbert's most dearly valued friends; and I have often thought that there was no one in the whole neighbourhood, either male or female, young or old, who understood and appreciated him as thoroughly as you have done."

"You pay me no light compliment in saying so," replied Mrs. Mathews; "but, nevertheless, I accept it without ceremony, for—"

"For you know you deserve it," said Lady Otterborne, affectionately taking her hand.

"Perhaps it is merely accident which has led an old woman and a young man to be such fast friends," said Mrs. Mathews. "Had we not both been gardeners, or had we not both been bookworms, we might have gone on making bows and courtesies to each other as long as we both did live."

"Nor is your kindness to my dear son the only claim you have on my gratitude, my dear Mrs. Mathews. I owe you much, very much, for having so often indulged me with the society of your Janet. She has been a great comfort to me!—You have indeed, my dear child!" she added, taking the hand

of Janet, who was seated close beside her, and pressing it fondly to her lips ; "I never guessed how much I should owe to your good father, when I used to scold him for being too theoretical and visionary. Some of his theories, Janet, are decidedly realised in you. Don't you think so, Mrs. Mathews?"

If anything could at that moment have bound both Mrs. Mathews and her adopted daughter more closely to Lady Otterborne, it was this allusion to her lang-syne friendship to "John Anderson." It made them feel, more than anything else could possibly have done, that they had something like a prescriptive right to draw nearer to her in her present altered condition than any one else among her neighbours. And that her condition was altered, she had taken no pains to conceal.

All the servants in the house had been paid, and dismissed,— excepting Mrs. Morris, who had been Lady Otterborne's personal attendant for the last fifteen years.

Her wages were not extravagantly high, for Lady Otterborne had never been extravagant in any way; but nevertheless her stipend was about three times as much as she now intended to pay to any servant. The difficulties which must attend such a change in her establishment as Lady Otterborne contemplated, were wonderfully lessened by the manner in which she sat about achieving it. The machinery was very simple, and therefore the less likely to be deranged, and her first business-like conversation with Mrs. Morris may be quoted as a fair sample of it,

The mistress and maid being *tête-à-tête*, the former said,—

"I know you must be aware, dear Morris, that my situation is greatly changed, and that it will be therefore necessary for me to part with you ?"

"Necessary, my lady !" was the good woman's almost terrified reply; and there she stopped.

"My good Morris, I should think that by this time every servant in the house must be aware that it is necessary to part with them all : the doing so will be more painful, I assure you, than any of the other changes which we shall be obliged to make. Our embarrassments are, I believe, chiefly owing to the dangerous habit of letting accounts go running on without examination ; and Sir Herbert is so much convinced of this, that the first thing he did upon succeeding to the property, was to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the real state of his affairs. The result of this, Morris, gives hope for the future; provided that we rigorously abstain from expense at present.

And this, Morris, we are determined to do. I should wish you to state this to all the servants. When they all understand what we are about, they will feel that our parting with them is not a matter of choice, but of necessity ”

On this occasion, Mrs. Morris had not answered a single word. It might be that she did not feel herself capable of speaking .But the lady's bidding was done ; and before sunset, every servant in the house knew that they were dismissed.

When Morris attended her lady on the following morning, she displayed a striking instance of the force of example ; for instead of shaking in every limb, with streaming eyes and a faltering tongue, she looked almost as quietly composed as Lady Otterborne herself.

She began by giving a very business-like account of the execution of her commission, and by stating the hopes of all the individuals about to depart, that her ladyship would be pleased to say a good word for them in the way of character.

And then Mrs. Morris, with the same steady demeanour, asked if her ladyship would be kind enough to hear her speak one little word about her own concerns.

“ Sit down then, Morris,” said Lady Otterborne, “ and let me hear if there is anything that I can do for you.”

“ Oh, yes, my lady !” she replied ; “ but it is so much that I am almost afraid to ask it,—for if you refuse I do not know what is to become of me.”

“ I am sure, my dear Morris, that you cannot really doubt my wish to serve you. What is it you have got in your head ? ”

“ Why first, my lady, I want you, if you please, to remember how the last fifteen years of my life have been spent.”

“ They have been spent, Morris, in most faithful and affectionate service to me,” was the reply.

“ No, my lady ! that is not what I want at all. I want to remind your ladyship, if I might be so bold, that I have given up all the friends and relations that I had in the world,—because if I had not I must have left your ladyship, for my people all lived a great way off, in North Wales ; and now my mother and father are both dead, and my only sister has got such a house-full of children that I could not stand it, my lady.”

“ But, my good Morris, you must not talk as if you were an old woman, for you are but a year or two older than I am ; and you are quite as capable of being a valuable servant now as ever you were.”

“ No, Lady Otterborne, I am not !” replied poor Morris, very

solemnly. "I am conscious that I can never again be a valuable servant to any lady but you."

"But, my dear good woman, I have no longer the power of paying your wages ; and you have known too well what I have suffered from debts, Morris, to wish me to begin the system again ?" said her mistress, gravely.

"Not to save my life, my lady !—No ! I do not think I would be the means of your doing it, if it was to save my life !" replied Morris, fervently. "It is not that which I would ask, if I dared to do it."

"Dared !" returned Lady Otterborne, smiling ; "you did not use to be so very much afraid of me. What is it you would have me do, Morris ?"

"It is no trifle, my lady, I won't say it is," returned Morris ; "I want both you and my young master to give me a writing, promising that you will never turn me out of your house to work for my bread as long as you have got bread to feed me, without hurting yourselves. As to wages, that is no object to me whatever ; I have got three hundred pounds upon good security, at four per cent.,—and if you will pay me eight pounds a year (which is what you would give a maid-of-all-work), that would make twenty ; and that is more than I ever spend in clothes, my lady."

"Maid-of-all-work, Morris ! Are you fit for a maid-of-all-work ?" said Lady Otterborne, shaking her head.

"Yes, my lady, more fit than almost anybody I know ; for, in the first place, I don't remember that I ever had a day's illness in my life, and in the next, I am proud to say that I think I know a little of everything."

Lady Otterborne longed to say yes ; but she still fancied that it was her duty to say no, till it suddenly occurred to Morris that her young master should be called in to give his opinion on the subject,—and the question was then very speedily settled in the most rational manner possible ; for he did give her exactly such a promise as she had asked for, which it was very clearly evident satisfied every wish of her affectionate heart ; while Lady Otterborne, on her side, was equally satisfied by Herbert's very clear statement of his affairs as they actually stood, and which statement assuredly was sad enough ; yet nevertheless it showed clearly that if the scheme he had laid down were adhered to, the seven years of Morris's services might be remunerated at the end of it, without any danger of again involving the estate.

So Mrs. Morris was immediately installed as maid-of-all-work, at a salary of eight pounds per annum; and had she been installed as empress of the whole earth she could not have been a happier or more triumphant woman.

When Mrs. Mathews and Janet reached the Manor-house they found the hall door open, but no human being was visible. The old house-dog lay stretched, as usual, upon a mat before the billiard-room door; but Janet having become his intimate acquaintance, he suffered her and her friend to pass up the great staircase unchallenged. Fortunately Janet was not only well acquainted with the dog, but with the house also, and she therefore led the way without difficulty to Lady Otterborne's dressing-room,—which was more than Mrs. Mathews could have done, for she had never been in it before.

There was, however, something not only sad, but very strange in the stillness of a mansion which heretofore had been rather remarkable for a profusion of domestics. But all this was speedily forgotten; and before the two ladies had to retrace their steps through the silent mansion, they had both absolutely forgotten that anything like misfortune had befallen the family.

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## CHAPTER L.

HERBERT was not with his mother when the expected guests entered her dressing-room; for Herbert had, to say truth, a good deal of business to attend to; and at the moment Mrs. Mathews and Janet crossed the hall, he was shut into the great drawing-room, at the upper end of it, engaged in a most interesting *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Morris, concerning the best, the easiest, and the safest way of shutting up all the largest and most splendid apartments.

Herbert himself was of opinion that the best way would be to fasten all the windows completely, and plaster them up on the outside. But to this Mrs. Morris objected,—assuring him that nothing was so likely to do the house permanent injury as the total exclusion of air; and so eloquently and so reasonably did she descant upon this theme, that the young man gave way; but it was only upon condition that the doors were never to be left open.

"The rooms we are to live in, Morris," said he, "must be made very comfortable; but don't let my mother ever look into any of the others."

And this arrangement was very fully understood and agreed to.

And truly poor Herbert found it was a very pleasant thing to have a Mrs. Morris to consult; for her practical little notions were of immense utility in bringing his grand general design into execution; and she made him perfectly well understand how the carpets were to be managed, and how the curtains were to be disposed of, and how, with her own hands, she meant to cover up everything that was gilt, so that at the end of seven years "my lady" should find everything looking a deal better than it did now.

It certainly would have been a very different thing if Sir Herbert had been left to his own devices on all such subjects; but as the new maid-of-all-work managed it, a bright gleam of hope, distant as it was, seemed more or less to rest upon every careful contrivance that she pointed out to him; and the three hours which followed his *tête-à-tête* breakfast with his mother were very far from being painful hours.

But when these three hours were past, he began rather frequently to look at his watch. But this had not continued long before Morris perceived it, and very naturally mistaking the cause of his evident impatience, she said, "Oh! Master Herbert, I am quite sure that I am tiring you out with my long histories about carpets and curtains! What an old fool I must be to go on so, to be sure!"

"But you have not tired me, Morris!" exclaimed Sir Herbert, very earnestly; "on the contrary, all you have been saying has interested me so much as to make me almost forget that Mrs. Mathews promised to call on my mother this morning, and the time she named has been passed this half hour."

"Company coming to call on my lady this morning?" cried poor Morris, looking greatly dismayed; "and, oh dear Sir Herbert! who was there to let them in?"

"Nobody, Morris, that is quite certain. But surely if they had come, we must have heard them?"

"And the dog, and all! Oh! for certain, if they had come, we must have heard them," repeated Morris,—hurrying out, however, with a look of great alarm, to ascertain whether any stray guests were seeking admittance.

And Sir Herbert hurried out, too; but recollecting that one

at least of the expected ladies knew how to find her way to his mother's dressing-room, he hastened hither himself, and made the three he found there laugh heartily by his description of Mrs. Morris's dismay at the idea that "company" had to find their way to "my lady" without being announced.

Considering the situation of his affairs, the statement may appear rather difficult to believe, yet nevertheless it is perfectly true, that Sir Herbert Otterborne had never in his life passed an hour of such perfect and such conscious enjoyment as that which now followed his entrance to his mother's dressing-room.

A multitude of painful feelings from a multitude of inevitable sources had been so constantly wont to assail him during by far the greater portion of his past life, that the suddenly feeling himself free from them all gave a sensation of *bien être* to his existence that he was himself at a loss to understand.

For he knew he was very poor, and, what was worse still, he knew that his dear delicate mother was very poor likewise. Moreover he knew, that though he had himself rarely spent a needless shilling, he was, at the head of the Otterborne family, deeply in debt, and that the only possible way by which he could ever hope to be free from it, was to be found in such rigid economy as must perforce involve the necessity of very great privation to that dearly-loved and long-suffering mother.

And how could he ever dare to feel pleasure from looking in the sweet, innocent, happy young face of Janet?

It does seem strange that he could dare to do so ; yet here it was that lay the great secret of this unspeakable happiness. From the hour he had first seen her to the present he had not only never dared to look at her, but most truly and literally he had never dared to think of her—for, did not every look and every thought tend to convince him that "he of womankind could love but her alone ?" And could he confess this deep conviction to himself, without confessing at the same time that he was a hypocrite and a deceiver ? And yet if there was a man in the world who would readily have had his right-hand cut off than be either, it was Herbert Otterborne.

But the web that entangled him was one from which there was no escape, save by plunging into deeper misery still ; for deep, desperately deep, and desperately strong, as was his love of the innocent, unconscious Janet Anderson, his watchful care of his admirable mother seemed to be something deeper and stronger still.

In telling himself, at early morn and dewy eve (as he had been constantly doing for several months past), that he must live and die without ever letting Janet know that he loved her, he only doomed himself to a miserable and heartless existence, and this he thought he could bear. But did he refuse to accept the offered hand of Emily Steyton, his punishment would be the seeing his mother exposed to such difficulties and anxiety as he truly believed might shorten her precious life. And this he could not bear.

But now, though there was no more chance of his marrying Janet for many, many years to come than of his becoming owner of a diamond mine, he still felt himself to be the happiest of men.

And, in a modified degree, the sensations of the three ladies he found in his mother's dressing-room were very like his own. They were, in short, all relieved from that heaviest of all afflictions—the consciousness that, if they did exactly what they thought right, they were sure to be unhappy; and that if they yielded for a moment to any feeling of their hearts, they were sure to be wrong.

Had it not been for this blessed relief, it is certainly possible that Sir Herbert Otterborne and his mother, and their sympathising friends likewise, might not have found so much more of amusement than of woe in discussing all the details of the economical projects by the aid of which they hoped to achieve so much.

But Mrs. Mathews, as she scrutinised the countenance of Sir Herbert, saw nothing in the newly-awakened energy which she read there which looked in any degree like an intention of amusing himself by idle experiments. During this first strangely happy meeting, and during many others which followed, he explained to her both his objects and the means by which he hoped to attain them; and she very soon felt certain that, if it was possible under the circumstances to re leem the estate, the estate would be redeemed.

That there was a recent, and a still unacknowledged, tie between the Manor-house and the Grange, was made very evident by the constant intercourse which was now established between them. The "Den" seemed almost forsaken; for Mrs. Mathews soon perceived so clearly that she was most particularly useful at the Manor-house, that it would have rested like a sin on her conscience had she failed to go there daily. It might be that part of this usefulness consisted in her chaperoning Janet thither; for Sir Herbert being no longer an engaged man,

Janet's passing a considerable portion of every day at his house might have been considered objectionable, had not the daily visit of Mrs. Mathews to the widow explained it.

But excepting these most kind and welcome visits from these her nearest neighbours, Lady Otterborne saw no one.

The terrible manner of her husband's death, and the perfectly well-known confusion in which he had left his affairs, rendered it perfectly natural that one whose delicate health had so long kept her out of general society, should now be leading very nearly the life of a hermit; and no one guessed, no, not one, that now, for the first time since her marriage, Lady Otterborne was leading a very happy and a very cheerful life.

Herbert had found means of convincing their maid-of-all-work, that if she insisted upon performing the duties of a cook, in addition to those of lady's maid, housekeeper, and housemaid, it was just possible that she might not find time for all—though she was extremely well inclined to "add the night unto the day," and therefore she had at length consented, though very reluctantly, to admit this very necessary auxiliary.

When this was done, and Herbert's man-of-all-work established in his somewhat heterogeneous functions, a more snugly comfortable domestic arrangement has been seldom seen than that which was established in the half-dozen rooms which Mrs. Morris had consented to leave open for use in the noble old Manor-house.

But while these minor regulations were deliberately arranged and strictly acted upon within the mansion, the weightier matters without were equally well attended to.

It is a vastly true saying, that no man knows what he can do till he has been tried.

Neither himself or the mother who bore him had the least idea that Herbert was blest with a sort of innate financial capacity of the most active and accurate kind; and without this he certainly never would have achieved what he did achieve.

He soon found that, although his tenants would many of them have been well pleased to *accommodate* him in the same style that they had accommodated his father, they were willing enough to agree to some improved terms, without any such ruinous conditions; and this in a way that convinced him, in more cases than one, that some of the best farms were underlet—and as the leases were all short, this was rather an important discovery.

But on the other hand he found that many tradesmen who had long standing bills against the family, were not to be so easily dealt with as he had expected.

In no case, however, did the spendthrift's heir ever plead that the credit had been given to his father and not to him. Upon one or two occasions, when he had been politely reminded of gambling debts which his "good father had forgotten to provide for," he very distinctly answered that he recognised in such debts no claim upon himself; and all such claims therefore speedily died a natural death. But to every tradesman who had furnished his father's family during his life, he gave an immediate written assurance that his death would be no impediment to their being paid.

Among the most troublesome of these was Minny's father,—who, within a week after he had received Sir Herbert's written acknowledgment of the debt, declared that if he was not paid immediately, he would, upon the strength of that acknowledgment, treat him exactly as he had treated his father.

Had a reasonable portion of time been allowed him, Sir Herbert could have easily found the funds necessary by the sale of timber. But it was evident that his creditor was not a man to be trifled with; and the sale of some of the old family plate, instead, was the only resource which suggested itself.

Neither on this subject nor on any other had he any concealments from his mother, and he scrupled not to tell her immediately of the claim, of the threats which accompanied it, and of the means which he had thought of as the best way of getting rid of it.

Lady Otterborne's delicate cheek flushed a little, as she listened to him.

"Your old plate, dearest Herbert?" said she. "Is this, indeed, necessary?"

"I fear it is, mother! But what matters it?" he added, cheerfully; "there are so many of the heaviest articles which we have never been in the habit of using, or even of seeing, that we shall never miss them. And I really know not where else to look for the money."

"Have you been paid, dearest, for the two carriages?—and for all the horses, and harness, and all the rest of it?"

"Alas! yes," he replied; "the paying off all the servants took a much larger sum than I expected,—for they were nearly all in arrears. And all that remained was all too little, dear mother, to pay the interest due upon that last mortgage."

"It is that last mortgage which has crippled us, dear Herbert!" said his mother, shaking her head rather disconsolately. He held up his finger to her in a threatening attitude,—

"Remember, mother, I have told you already, that if you ever look grave about money-matters I shall set off instantly and endeavour to find another heiress,—and it may be that she will not turn out such a nice run-away girl as my beauteous Emily!"

"Spare me the heiress, Herbert!" she replied, "and I will give you up the soup-tureens, the tankards, the hunting-cups, the venison-dishes, and all the rest of it, without a murmur."

"There's a good mother," said Herbert, gaily. "Our gentle neighbour, Mr. Stokes, shall not long have the honour of being one of our creditors. I will lose no time about it, I promise you. Morris has got the keys, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is part of her business, you know, as maid-of-all-work. But stay Herbert!—stay one minute. I know it will half break her heart to take out the old things to be sold. Don't you think that you and I could do it? I know perfectly well where the chests are kept."

"And so do I too, mother, and we will ransack them together. Shall I ring?"

"No, Herbert! I think you had better not ring," said his mother, laughing, "for I know she is exceedingly busy in sweeping and dusting, and I know also that she hates to appear before my ladyship in her all-work costume. I daresay she has got all the keys in her pocket; and I am almost sure you will find her on the stairs."

Herbert vanished,—and re-appeared again in a moment, with a very magnificent bunch of many-sized keys in his hand.

"Give them to me, Herbert! I do not imagine that I know them all, but I know several," said Lady Otterborne, receiving the keys from the hand of her son.

She looked at them for a moment, and then suddenly rising, she said,—

"Wait for me one moment, Herbert, and I will return to you,"—and she glided rapidly out of the room as she spoke, closing the door after her.

Her absence had been just long enough to make her son wonder a little as to the cause of it, when she re-appeared with an open casket in her hand.

"How dull have we both been never to think of this resource before!" said she, presenting the glittering treasure to him.

"Your diamonds! my dearest mother! Oh, no! I cannot consent to sell your jewels!"

"Then I am very happy to tell you that I can, you silly boy," she replied,—"and moreover, young gentleman, I WILL! I do not know, dear Herbert, that it is by any means likely we should soon want our tureens and our venison dishes, but I certainly do please myself sometimes by thinking that it is possible we may see them in use again some day or other. But of these diamonds, no!—There is neither hope nor wish in my heart that they ever should be useful to me again."

"But to me, mother, there would be something inexpressibly painful in the idea of selling them. All other things seem to be in common between us; but as to these, they are so decidedly, so peculiarly your own, that I cannot endure their being sold."

"Do you know, my dear son," she replied, "that I have made one really philosophical reflection since you and I have been people of business, and obliged to act for ourselves? It has been very well said that 'sweet are the uses of adversity,' and as far as I have yet seen, the sweetest and the best seems to be the sort of activity which it gives to the faculty called common sense. When serious cares and serious business beset us, the nonsense and fal-lalery of life seems to wither, crumble, and fall away, leaving us in the grand simplicity of reality. That is MY condition, Herbert, at this moment; and I do assure you that the putting in competition the silly vanity of keeping these toys, against the solid advantage of selling them, seems to me like a positive derangement of intellect."

"It may be so, mother," replied the young man; "but I suppose fal-lalery, as you call it, is stronger within me than common sense. For I cannot help feeling that the selling these toys would be very painful to me."

"Let me ask you one question, Herbert, to which, if you answer yes, I withdraw my request that these trinkets should be sold. Herbert!—do you wish to keep them for Janet?"

Janet herself could scarcely have blushed more perceptibly, had she heard the question; neither could she, with all her truth, have answered it with more perfect sincerity.

"No, dearest mother!—no!" ejaculated Herbert: "let her but wear your honoured name, and the first and dearest hope of my heart will be satisfied!"

"And the surest way to enable you to invest her with that

name, is for us to sell everything that can assist us in getting out of debt," said his mother.

And thereupon the casket of diamonds disappeared, and was exchanged for a sum very far exceeding the hopes of either mother or son.

Nor was this transaction kept secret either from Janet or her adopted mother ; and when Lady Otterborne playfully described the manner of it, not forgetting the little *coup de théâtre* by which it was concluded, not all the jewels that ever imperial bridegroom gave, or royal bride accepted, ever caused a warmer flush of pride and joy than was produced on Janet by this anecdote, recited as it was in a tone that was redolent of joy by the mother of Herbert.

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## CHAPTER LI.

Poor Mr. Mathews meanwhile was in a state which he constantly assured his kind-hearted father-in-law very nearly approached distraction. And beyond all doubt, the forsaken grandfather was very anxious ; but he would have been still more so, perhaps, had he not felt a little secret suspicion that his beloved Stephen might have exaggerated a little. "Poor dear boy !—It was so natural that he should dislike returning, just at first, to the scene of his cruel disappointment !" And it really was a very fortunate thing that this interpretation of his darling's lengthened absence had suggested itself, for it soothed him greatly. The not hearing at all was a consolatory circumstance, as it was a proof that he was not dead ; and in this manner he sustained his spirits sufficiently to prevent his becoming either sick or mad, for another interval of nearly three weeks,—and then came not the announcement of his death, but a letter, tolerably well written, from the hand of the young gentleman himself, stating that by the especial interference of a manifold providence, his life had been spared, after a very skilful practitioner had declared his immediate death to be certain.

"But my sorrows do not end here," continued the unfortunate young man,—“for during the time that I was either insensible

or delirious, my pocket-book and purse were stolen, and the first melancholy effect of my returning senses was to show me that I was penniless ! It has been perfectly impossible for me," he added, "to discover the thief,—for my poor landlady, who is really, though poor, a very worthy person, has been obliged to have more than one person in, to hold me during my delirium ; and, as she truly says, it is impossible for me to know which of them was the thief. Now, therefore, my ever dear and ever generous grandfather, I must again throw myself upon your affection,—and, I may say, upon your mercy ; for unless you immediately send me enough money to pay the just demands that are made upon me here, together with what will be necessary to pay my journey back to your dear peaceful home, I must still perish without having been again blessed by an embrace from you ! Less than forty pounds will, I am sorry to say, be of no use to me,—for my good doctor's bill is still to be paid, as well as my lodgings and attendance ; for, alas ! I was robbed before I had been well enough to pay anything."

This letter, which concluded as usual with the most enthusiastic expressions of affection, was, of course, a very great comfort to the *grandfather*,—but it was, as he truly said, a very great shock to the *man*. He hesitated not for a single moment, however, about sending the supply of money demanded,—and was rewarded for his generosity by seeing his grandson enter the parlour two days afterwards, at the moment the family were sitting down to dinner.

The meeting was a very tender one between Mr. Mathews and his restored grandson ; and great indeed was the joy of the former, at perceiving that the desperate illness which had caused him such terrible alarm, had left no traces of suffering behind it.

" Ah ! my dear boy !" said the delighted old gentleman, "what a fine thing it is to be young ! Young people do sometimes die, there is no denying that,—but illness, when it does not kill, really passes away from the young like breath from a looking-glass. It just gives a dimness for the moment, and then goes away as if by magic ! "

And certainly Mr. Stephen Cornington did look wonderfully well, considering the dreadful illness from which he had been suffering. Nevertheless, it was easy to perceive every now and then that his fine clear voice became rather feeble, and sometimes, when he made any movement,—like holding out his plate, or the like—his hand trembled ; and then he shook his

head, and said with a mournful sigh, "Alas ! my dear grandfather, I fear that looks are not always to be trusted !"

Mrs. Mathews had very perceptibly changed colour at the moment when her restored grandson made his unexpected appearance in the dining-room. That she had never loved him very dearly is quite certain, and it is equally so that this defect of affection on her part was not occasioned by any want of attentive observance on his.

It really was not the young man's fault if he were not so fondly caressing to her as to his grandfather. He had decidedly made the attempt, but it had not answered ;—and it cannot be doubted that the acute Stephen Cornington was aware of this.

Nevertheless he saw, or fancied he saw, still less of liking in her manner to him now than heretofore. Was it because she had found out how much money he had contrived to get ? He had given his beloved grandfather credit for more discretion.

But whatever the cause might be, the increased dislike begot increased dislike,—and there was no need of this, for he had disliked her with very considerable heartiness before.

As to Janet, he had long ago made up his mind to take the least possible notice of her in any way ; and as poor Mr. King was so nearly blind as scarcely to know one person from another till they spoke to him, the task of properly welcoming the interesting invalid devolved altogether on his grandfather.

Days and weeks rolled on, making little apparent change in the situation of any of the persons of our little drama. The continued absence of the Steyton family ; Louisa Price also having joined their happy party ; the increasing infirmities of good old Mr. King ; the terrible death of Sir Charles Otterborne, together with all the changes at the Manor-house, which followed it, had altogether put a stop for the present to all the hospitable meetings which used so frequently to bring together the families resident at Weldon ; but it may be easily imagined that this change was hailed as a blessing by the four friends who now so constantly passed a portion of every day together at the Manor-house.

That Mr. Stephen Cornington should find all this most desperately dull, can certainly astonish no one. A daily ride to Hertford with his old grandfather was really his only recreation,—excepting that sometimes after that beloved grandfather was fast asleep, he would occasionally contrive to get out unheard, and unseen, and scamper back again to the county town, where

he was fortunate enough to meet more than one who could soothe the wearying tedium of his present existence by a few games of billiards.

Human beings, ungrateful, short-sighted human beings, are very apt to complain that happiness does not last long, when we get it. But if it did, where would be the ceaseless progress by which the world moves on towards its destiny?

When all concealment, all mystery, all doubt, and all fear had been removed from the attachment and the engagement which united Sir Herbert Otterborne and Janet Anderson ; when the most cordial approbation from the real mother of the one, and the adopted mother of the other had ratified and sanctified their engagement ; when no day was suffered to pass without their meeting, and no meeting ever took place without their feeling that they were dearer to each other when they parted, than they had been when they met—when all this was achieved, and most certainly all this was achieved then Herbert Otterborne and Janet Anderson believed themselves to be the very happiest people in existence.

And yet before many months were gone and over, although nothing whatever had occurred to make either of them doubt this delightful fact—but when, on the contrary, everything that had occurred tended to confirm it, why did Herbert begin invariably to look sorrowful whenever this fact was alluded to? Why did Janet, though she watched this sorrow in silence, invariably look as if she perfectly agreed with him? And why did the two maternal ladies, one on this side the fire, and the other on that, why did they too always look as if there was considerable cause for his melancholy, though it would be better perhaps to say nothing about it?

But at length, however, some one bolder than the rest (it was, probably, the melancholy Herbert himself), confessed the real cause why this “winter of discontent” had succeeded the glorious summer of hope and joy which had preceded it. The real cause was, that they had all agreed together in council that the affianced lovers were to wait for seven years before they were married.

How very true it is that everything is comparative ! When it was first openly avowed amongst them that the engagement was to be entered into by the young people, and ratified by the old ones, they all felt as if they defied the power of the whole world to make them feel otherwise than happy ; and they were quite ready to repeat the defiance now—only an opinion was

first whispered, and then pronounced very audibly indeed by Sir Herbert, that if they could be married immediately they should be a great deal happier still.

And such is the weakness of human nature, that from the time this impatient thought was openly confessed, comparison set to work, and speedily proved beyond the power of contradiction that, considered with reference to what might be their actual situation, was very far indeed from happiness.

This might be wrong, perhaps, inasmuch as it set at nought all those struggles for a contented spirit which are thought to constitute the perfection of human wisdom. But at any rate we may say in its defence, that it was conducive to activity of mind and energy of purpose, and while discussing the possible and impossible ways by which a gentleman may increase his worldly wealth, it became very evident that there were few things, however toilsome, which a gentleman might do, which poor Sir Herbert was not willing to undertake.

But, alas! it soon became only too evident that all these discussions were but idle talk, and that the poor debt-burdened baronet, young as he was, was too old to learn a profession.

It was after watching the expressive countenance of her son, after one of these abortive conversations, that Lady Otterborne whispered in the ear of Mrs. Mathews at the moment of parting :

“Come to me alone to-morrow, my dear friend, and come early. Sir Herbert is going to Hertford on business, and I wish to enjoy a *tête-à-tête* gossiping with you before he comes back.”

Mrs. Mathews promised this, and kept her word.

“Now then, dear neighbour,” said Lady Otterborne, “let us open our hearts to each other with the most perfect freedom, even though the subject be that very ticklish thing called money. Shall we?”

To this fresh question poor Mrs. Mathews answered, “Yes;” though unhappily it was precisely the subject on which it was the most painful for her either to speak or to think.

But satisfied with this acquiescence, and little suspecting that there was more than one heavy secret connected with this hateful theme, which was now threatening to become the greatest sorrow of her unfortunate friend’s existence, Lady Otterborne placed herself and her neighbour very comfortably upon the hearth-rug, and thus began :

“I shall propitiate you neither by preface nor apology, my

dear friend ; we understand each other much too well to render this needless. I am quite sure that you see and feel as well as I do, that noble as is the stedfast purpose of my son to clear himself from all the heavy claims which beset him, he will not, as things now are, achieve this without great suffering. Both our young people have from first to last behaved admirably !—I never ‘read in tale or history,’ any story of true love in which the parties have kept all their sorrows so completely to themselves.”

“ It is quite true, Lady Otterborne,” replied Mrs. Mathews. “ Though I pride myself a good deal on the affection of our Janet, and on the pleasant freedom from restraint in which we live together, it is a positive fact, that the affection which has been so long nestling in her heart for Herbert, was not only unknown, but absolutely rejected by me, after I had exerted all my powers of observation to discover whether any feeling of the kind existed or not.”

“ This was admirable—and it applies equally to them both,” returned her friend ; “ and this it is which now makes the evident depression of Herbert’s spirits so painful to me. I know that he must have suffered much, before I could have perceived that he suffered at all.”

“ Yet, what can be done to shorten this tedious interval ?” said Mrs. Mathews. “ In all the discussions on the subject to which you have so kindly permitted me to be a party, it has appeared to me that the plans laid down have been admirable, and the manner in which they appear to be adhered to is more admirable still.”

“ True—quite true. Your judgment is correct, Mrs. Mathews, and your praise is deserved,” said Lady Otterborne ; “ but nevertheless,” she continued, “ I am far from happy about my son. He has pledged himself to wait till he possesses a clear thousand a-year before he asks Janet to marry him ; for he well knows that with less than that it would be impossible for him to live here in such a way as to justify his asking her to live here with him. Nor could I conscientiously give my consent to the marriage before. It is very easy, and it is very natural after the tremendous event that has happened here, that my son and I should withdraw ourselves a good deal from society ; and having done this, all the details of our altered mode of living are kept naturally and unobtrusively out of sight, and in this way the tedious and difficult task which he set himself may be performed, without his altered mode of living being made the

theme of eternal gossipings. But the case would be far different if he were to present himself to the county in the character of a bridegroom. The doing so would be both painful and wrong ; it would, in fact, be rendering all the efforts we are now making utterly futile. It would be more rational to emigrate at once, and convert our Janet into an Australian shepherdess. And yet I feel certain that every year of this threatened seven will add about three to the age of Herbert."

"Nor do I quite expect that Janet will be as fair a bride then as now," said Mrs. Mathews, with a melancholy smile ; "yet what can be done to prevent it?"

"Ay, dear friend !—there is the question. Can anything be done ?—and what ? It would be folly indeed to look about us for an immediate, and a perfect cure for all the difficulties which beset us : but it has occurred to me that something might be hit upon to mend the matter, if not to cure it ; and with this hope before me, I feel sure, dearest Mrs. Mathews, that you will excuse my asking you frankly what the probable amount of Janet's fortune may be ? I know that it has been understood in the neighbourhood that her father's affairs are not yet finally settled—a delay which we all know must be almost inevitable when the concerns of a bank are to be gone over and arranged ; but it has been generally understood, I believe, that her fortune is likely to be considerable—and if this be so, may we not fairly hope that these terrible seven years may be shortened ?"

Unhappy Mrs. Mathews !—how bitterly did she now deplore the folly of which she had been guilty, in permitting this idle vision of Janet's possible wealth to grow into shape and form, so desperately like premeditated delusion, as to make her feel herself something very little better than a swindler ! She had determined from the first hour in which the love of Herbert had been acknowledged, that she would state to Lady Otterborne all she knew respecting these still unsettled affairs. But, alas ! the subject was a painful one ; and no allusion having ever been made to it, day after day had been suffered to steal away, till Mrs. Mathews herself had almost forgotten that there were any accounts still unsettled in which Janet had an interest.

But now her statements upon the subject were given with the most perfect unreserve, and the result of course was to convince the anxious mother that, whatever might be possible in future, there was nothing whatever to be reckoned upon at present ; and in this view of the case the two disconsolate ladies very perfectly agreed.

But at the very moment when this painful conviction was expressed by both with equal sincerity and equal sorrow, an idea suddenly occurred to Mrs. Mathews which caused her such a violent revulsion, from extreme despondence to extreme delight, that it was with very considerable difficulty she composed her features into an expression of sufficient gravity to suit the important occasion.

About three minutes before this inspiring idea suggested itself, Mrs. Mathews was in a state of such very severe mental suffering that, had it been in her nature to faint from painful emotion, she must have fainted then.

Happily, she did not faint, however ; but, instead of it, became, as I have said, a radiant personification of felicity.

The profoundly sad condition which had preceded this, was occasioned by the recollection of her own miserable settlement. She knew, indeed, that her Janet had no natural claim upon her ; and that, as she had never given the least hint that she had any intention of leaving her property to her, it would be probably supposed that, having no children, her estate was to go to some male relative.

Every one knew that Mr. King's property was in land ; and therefore as she often consoled herself by thinking, every one would thus interpret her having nothing to leave.

But now this terrible settlement suddenly appeared to her to be one of the very best and most fortunate that had ever been devised. Had she permitted herself to be ruled by her poor dear father, she would now, certainly, have been in a position that would have enabled her to bequeath about two thousand a year to the daughter of John Anderson ; but, in that case, the bequest would not, in all human probability, have come to her till long after the hoped-for redemption of Sir Herbert Otterborne's property had been accomplished : but now !—

She could scarcely believe in the reality of her own happiness ; but neither could she very easily forgive herself for not having remembered it before. Now she might immediately make over to her the five hundred a year which her very imprudent settlement had put in her power.

"Would five hundred a year render it possible for them to marry immediately, Lady Otterborne ?" said Mrs. Mathews, abruptly, and fixing her eyes eagerly on those of her companion.

"But where is five hundred a year to come from ?" replied the anxious mother, looking a little vexed at the seeming futility of the inquiry.

"I know perfectly well where it would come from," replied Mrs. Mathews, "provided you and Herbert think it would be enough to justify an immediate marriage. You have not answered that question, dear lady!"

"The question has taken me so completely by surprise," was the reply, "that I really do not know how I ought to answer it. But, as far as I am able to judge, I own it appears to me that it might obviate all difficulties; that is, provided our young couple would be contented for a year or two to live rather quietly."

"I am sure I can answer for Janet," returned the happy Mrs. Mathews.

"And I certainly think I can answer for Herbert," rejoined Lady Otterborne, with a delighted smile; for she felt, notwithstanding the mystery which hung upon the proposal, that there must be hope in it, or else that her friend had unequivocally lost her senses.

"Now, then, I will leave you, my dear friend," said Mrs. Mathews; "and will leave the question as to the adequate amount of the supplies to be settled by you and Herbert. If you both agree that they may venture to marry upon it, there is no reason whatever why preparations should not begin to-morrow."

"The idea is very delightful, but so startling that I feel as if I were dreaming!" said Lady Otterborne.

"No!—it is I who have been dreaming! But, thank Heaven, I am awake at last; and not too late either! Herbert shall not look fifty years old upon his wedding-day!"

And, having said this, Mrs. Mathews disappeared; and certainly enjoyed the happiest walk through the park that had ever fallen to her lot, even though she had more than once traversed it with John Anderson.

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## CHAPTER LII.

It will be easily believed that no very long time was permitted to elapse, after Herbert's return from Hertford, before

his mother had made him acquainted with the foregoing conversation ; nor will it be more difficult to believe that his happiness very greatly exceeded his power of expressing it ; nor was it for a full hour after he had heard it, that his heart left his head sufficiently at leisure to feel puzzled as to the source from whence this blessed five hundred a year was to come.

But on this point his mother could give him no satisfaction ; she thought about it, however, a good deal, and at length she suggested that it probably would come from the Indian trustees, who had been appointed by Mr. Anderson to look after the affairs of his daughter.

" It may be so, mother," replied Sir Herbert ; " but in that case it appears to me doubtful whether our dear Mrs. Mathews can be quite certain that these said trustees will approve of the match for her. They must be made to understand the state of the case exactly. Neither you nor I, mother, should choose to receive their five hundred a year without their being made acquainted with everything about us. But alas ! alas !—what then becomes of the immediate marriage which you say the dear soul talked about ? "

" I know nothing,—I can guess nothing !" replied his mother. " But of one thing you may be assured, and that is, that you may safely trust Mrs. Mathews."

" Do not think I doubt her !" cried Herbert eagerly. " I have known her longer than you have done ; and I would trust her, mother, as I would trust you."

Just as they arrived at this point of the dialogue, a note from the Grange was put into the hands of Lady Otterborne. It only contained these words : " I must know Sir Herbert's answer before I sleep. My dear father complains of gouty symptoms, and has ordered water-gruel and the warming-pan to be ready for him at eight o'clock ; so I have ordered the carriage to be ready for me, and, unless you say no ! Janet and I will take our tea with you, instead of at home.

" Ever yours, Mary Mathews."

" N.B. Do not say anything to Janet about the five hundred a year, for there is nothing in the world that makes her so melancholy, poor dear, as talking to her about business."

The value of this postscript was quite in accordance to the value usually assigned to that portion of feminine correspondence, which is as much as to say, that it contained the

matter of principal importance in the dispatch. And so it did ;—for Janet herself was the only human being except the parties themselves, and their lawyers, who knew anything about this remarkable settlement ; and to her Mrs. Mathews had related the whole transaction,—both for the sake of making her understand, poor child, that dearly as she was beloved, she could inherit nothing from her at her death, and that during her life the power she possessed over this said five hundred a year was perfectly independent of her husband. And this communication once made, no allusion had ever been made to it afterwards. But it was not likely that Janet had forgotten it ; and were she to be questioned on the subject, her simple statement of the case might, as Mrs. Mathews very justly feared, render Sir Herbert somewhat unwilling to accept the terms proposed.

But, unfortunately for the success of this scheme, this precaution was useless ; for Sir Herbert was not in the room when the note was given to his mother ; and the most important part of it being the promised coming of these welcome guests, the postscript was utterly forgotten when this very agreeable fact was announced to him.

Though Sir Herbert had not returned very early, and though the visitors did not arrive very late, there was time enough for Lady Otterborne to communicate to her son all that had passed in the morning.

That five hundred a year would enable them to marry immediately, without committing any very terrible imprudence, was very decidedly the opinion of both ; and the only doubt about it that remained with either of them was respecting the fund from which this income was to be derived.

But it was so thoroughly the opinion of Lady Otterborne that Mrs. Mathews alone could be the judge as to the propriety of making this liberal allowance to her young ward, that it would be impossible, in her judgment, to challenge the propriety of it without betraying a greater propensity to doubt her discretion than it would be reasonable to feel, or to express.

Sir Herbert nodded his assent.

Could he do otherwise, when at that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Mathews and Janet entered ?

“ Well, does he think they could live ? ” said Mrs. Mathews, in a whisper, as Lady Otterborne took her hand to welcome her.

A smile, a nod in the affirmative, and an affectionate pressure of her mysterious neighbour’s hand was the answer ; and it

seemed to be perfectly satisfactory,—for never was a happier creature seen than Mrs. Mathews at that moment.

The tea-table, which the maid-of-all-work had laid out with as much care as if it had been a banquet prepared for half the county, appeared to the four happy creatures who sat round it as the only spot on earth where real happiness could be found. But when this lounging, lingering, and most sociable repast was over, Herbert made Janet regale him with one of her genuine Scotch songs, which, though she had never seen the land of cakes, she sang as only a Scotch lassie could sing it. And while she sang, and he listened, the two maternal ladies continued to converse together in whispers on the sofa : but even this very distinct *aside* did not appear to satisfy their longing for private consultation ; for after a short time Lady Otterborne rose, and lighting a side candle, led off Mrs. Mathews into her bed-room.

The Scotch songs did not go on much longer, for Herbert, too, had many things that he wished to say confidentially to his companion.

All that Janet knew concerning the delightful change which had taken place in the aspect of their affairs was, that for some reason or other, it had been decided in privy-council, that it would not be necessary to wait quite seven years before they were married.

But Herbert knew considerably more than this ; for he knew that the funds which were to render this possible were to be furnished by Mrs. Mathews, and this puzzled him.

Had he been told that at the death of her adopted mother his Janet was to inherit her property, or a part of her property, he would not have thought it at all extraordinary, for it was well known that there was no entail on her estate ; but how this contingent inheritance was to enable them to marry *now*, he could not comprehend.

If Lady Otterborne had not led Mrs. Mathews out of the room, the curiosity of her son on this subject would probably have remained dormant till he had found himself *tête-à-tête* with her ; but the present opportunity was too tempting to be resisted, and having heard nothing of Mrs. Mathews' postscript, desiring that Janet might not be troubled on the subject, he said to her, without the slightest idea that he was committing any indiscretion,—

“ Do tell me, dearest, all you know about this most delightful change in the schedule of our ways and means. Who has dis-

covered the possibility of it now? And, why was it never discovered before?"

Instead of answering this question, Janet very eagerly addressed another to him,—

"Is it possible, Herbert," said she, "that you are also ignorant of the why and the how in this matter? There is, indeed, nothing very extraordinary in my knowing nothing about it, for my mother Mathews told me long ago that I never should hear anything about my own money-concerns till everything was settled on the subject at Madras; and she begged me so earnestly not to trouble her with any questions on the subject, that I have most scrupulously obeyed her injunctions, and avoided it altogether."

"And really and seriously, my Janet, you know nothing about this five hundred a year, nor where it is to come from?" demanded Herbert, gravely.

"What is it? How much did you say, Sir Herbert? Did you say five hundred a year?"

"Yes, dear love!—that is the sum which she says shall be paid to us till my estates are sufficiently cleared to enable us to do without it."

"Five hundred a year? Oh, yes! I do know a great deal, Herbert, about five hundred a year!" replied Janet, bursting into tears. "And it is so like her! Oh, yes, Herbert, I understand it all now!"

And in as short a time as it was possible to tell the story, she made him understand it all, too; and no more doubt was left on his mind than on Janet's, that the five hundred pounds thus offered to him was the independent income which she had so rashly given the reversion of her property to obtain.

"You are right, Janet. It is, indeed, very like her," said the young man, sighing profoundly; "but it would not be like us, would it, Janet, to accept it? Am I not an unlucky wretch? Look at this ingenious spite in my destiny? Janet is offered to me!—but precisely at the only price which I could refuse to pay!"

"Let us seek her at once!" said Janet, eagerly. "Let us not suppose for a moment, my dearest friend, that we would consent to purchase our own happiness at the expense of hers. Oh, Herbert, she is as generous as the day; and you can hardly guess the enjoyment she seems to find in spending this independent income for the gratification of her affection, her taste, and

her charity ! And shall we dry up the source of all this enjoyment ? No ! not even to be your wife would I do it ! ”

“ Would you desire better sympathy ? ” replied poor Herbert, with a melancholy smile. “ At any rate there is comfort in that, Janet. Yes, dearest ! we will go to her at once, and make her very angry, dear soul ! by letting her know that we have found her out.”

And they did go, and they not only made her very angry, but they very nearly broke her heart. Never was disappointment more unexpected or more overwhelming. It seemed to gall her to the quick that she could not make them understand the impossibility of her spending the money in any way that would produce for her so much heartfelt happiness.

“ But we do,—we do understand it ! ” said Janet, with her arms round her neck, endeavouring to pacify her by caresses.

“ You do understand it, and yet you refuse me ! ” cried poor Mrs. Mathews, lifting her streaming eyes to heaven in witness of their cruelty.

“ One moment’s consideration, my dear, dear friend, would set everything right between us ! ” cried Sir Herbert, earnestly. “ Janet is right when she says we understand you. But am I wrong when I say that you do not understand us ? Bethink you for a moment, dear old friend. Be as reasonable as you were wont to be when we used to discuss all things in heaven and earth together, in the ‘ Den.’ Let us be logical. You would do all this to make us happy, because you love us. But if the doing this would make us unhappy, the doing it would not be a proof of love. It would soon kill you, Mrs. Mathews, if this matter were to be arranged in your own way ; you would die from watching the misery you had brought upon us ! Why, I doubt whether my poor mother, my Janet, or myself, would ever be heard to laugh again. Would you wish me to do anything that, when it was done, you would pull down mountains to cover me rather than let Mr. Stephen Cornington know that I had done it ? Would you——”

“ Cease, Sir Herbert, cease ! ” cried the now conquered Mrs. Mathews, covering her face with both her hands : “ you have found an argument *there*, the strength of which shows nothing, perhaps, but my own contemptible nature. You are right, Herbert ! I yield, and you have your way. But you cannot give me back my happiness any more than I can promote yours.”

And the little party who, two short hours before, had seemed

ready to defy fate to make them sad or sorrowful, now separated with hearts so heavy, that they might all or either of them have very truly declared, that they felt sadness and sorrow to be their specially allotted portion in this vale of tears.

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### CHAPTER LIII.

Poor Mrs. Mathews found nothing very likely to cheer her on returning to her house; for Sally Spicer greeted her with the painful tidings that her father was restless and feverish, and that the gout "did not seem to be coming out kindly."

On going to his room, she found this statement was but too correct; and she therefore determined, after seeing her Janet safely in bed, to pass the night with Sally Spicer, in his chamber.

At first he seemed hardly conscious of her being there, and she flattered herself that he was dozing; but towards the morning, he appeared either more awake, or at any rate less incapable of conversing, for he now saw her, listened to her, and held her hand, though with a very feeble grasp, as he told her that he was better, and that she must not alarm herself.

But it is not possible to look at an ailing father of fourscore, especially if loved as dearly as Mr. King was by his daughter, without feeling alarm; and Mrs. Mathews was alarmed, and not without reason, for when the apothecary arrived, which he did as soon as it was light, he told her that there was certainly gout flying about him, but that there was want of strength to do battle with it.

The result of this state of things might easily be foreseen; and in the course of three days the kind-hearted gentle old man had breathed his last.

It must always be a painful moment to the heart when a parent dies who for so many years has been an object of so much love and care as Mr. King had been to his Mary.

The blank which follows the cessation of such care has something very sad in it, and Mrs. Mathews wept as bitterly as if she had mourned for one less full of years.

Janet was now, indeed, a comfort to her. Had Mr. Mathews

and his grandson been her only comforters, she would not have been well off,—for it was well-nigh impossible not to perceive that Mr. Stephen Cornington was very fully aware of the fact that it was the late master of the house who was dead and buried, and therefore that there must be, and that there was, another master; and now and then there was evidently something like a doubt upon his mind as to whether this master ought to be himself or his grandfather.

On this occasion, at least, Janet was quicker in perception than her heavy-hearted friend; for several little attempts at power (by no means unsuccessful either) which had grated against the feelings of Janet, had passed unnoticed by her friend.

It was scarcely, however, possible, that anything could have increased her dislike to him.

Her perfect conviction, in which Mr. Cuthbridge entirely agreed, that his atrocious confession on the subject of the *ci-devant* Emily Steyton was utterly false, had given birth to a feeling of such abhorrence towards him, that it required great command over herself to prevent its being visible to his grandfather, as well as to himself.

Had it not been for her friends at the Manor-house, she would certainly have pleaded the freedom of action which had always been accorded to her, and have left her home. But she loved the Otterbornes too well, and she loved her Janet too well, to tear them asunder; and the only perceptible effect of her increased dislike to her husband's grandson was her spending more hours in the house of Lady Otterborne than in her own.

Yet notwithstanding all her caution and all her forbearance, Stephen Cornington knew that he was hated quite as well as if she had been in the daily habit of telling him so; and heartily did he repay her.

Nor was it long after the death of Mr. King, before the highly-talented and bold-spirited young man began to think that he should now be very lamentably wasting his time, if he continued as the permitted guest of an old woman whom he detested, instead of assuming the place which it was so perfectly evident that his grandfather was willing to accord him.

"There is nothing," thought he, "that the old man would like so well as the seeing me sole lord and master of these goodly premises. As long as the other old fellow was alive, the case was different. The law made him master; and if he

had been bed-ridden outright, and as blind as a mole, we could not have ventured upon making any very important alteration in the household : but now the case is altered.

And truly the case was altered, and Mrs. Mathews very speedily became aware that she was pretty nearly a nonentity in her father's house. The hour of breakfast was changed ; the hour of dinner was changed. The man who for years had been Mr. King's favourite groom, and who since his daughter's marriage had been promoted to the place of coachman, was dismissed. The handsome hall was converted into a billiard-room — and worse still, a thousand times worse still, a favourite acquaintance or two in the billiard-playing line from Hertford became almost daily guests at the Grange.

Notwithstanding the sort of strict discipline established by Mrs. Mathews, respecting the uninterrupted disposal of her own time, she was not in other respects by any means a rigid or exacting mistress of a family. The same feeling which made her so very jealously keep guard over the uninterrupted disposal of her hours led her very greatly to prefer that all the members of her family should feel as independent as herself—this being by far the most effectual way of securing herself from interruption.

Moreover, like most other reading women, particularly when they happen to have no children, she was perhaps a little too indifferent concerning the routine of her "house affairs," very rarely permitting them to call her from occupations more congenial to her taste.

The best excuse that can be offered for this is, that Sally Spicer was a very efficient substitute. Her mistress felt that she was safe in trusting to her, and therefore she indulged herself by doing it. At first, therefore, a good many of Master Stephen's less important innovations were achieved by means of making his adoring and docile grandfather address himself with the authority of a master to the prime-minister of the establishment ; and for a time the prime-minister received his instructions and obeyed them, without troubling the lady in her "den ;" but at length Sally Spicer herself became so indignant at being told by her new master that his grandson preferred *purée* soup to all other, and therefore that it would be necessary to have *purée* soup every day, that she ventured to break in upon the sacred leisure of her mistress, in order to express her disapprobation.

If Sally Spicer had been less shocked at this, her mistress

might have been more so ; but the dislike of poor Mrs. Mathews to this detestable grandson was founded upon causes so much more important, that there was more of scorn than anger in her manner of listening to the remonstrance; and on perceiving this, Sally resolutely determined to let matters take their course —a system which her lady very perfectly approved ; for there were heavier anxieties weighing on her mind than any which the reports of Sally Spicer could awaken.

It was now, and now only, that all the miserable consequences of her ill-advised marriage became fully apparent to her. As long as her father lived he not only continued to be the master of his own house, but he certainly continued to profit by the newspaper companionship of his son-in-law ; neither had he ever changed his opinion upon the important fact, that men are more capable of looking after their property than women ; so that he had constantly gone on to the very last expressing his entire satisfaction in the marriage ; and this was quite enough to prevent her from confessing even to her own heart how very heartily she lamented it.

But now every feeling on the subject was altered ; and poor Mrs. Mathews saw all the fearful, all the fatal difference between her actual situation, and what it would have been had she been still Mary King, in the strongest possible light.

She indulged herself in no complainings either to her adopted child or to the Otterbornes ; for she felt that they had sorrows enough of their own, without her adding to them by expatiating on her own situation—the worst feature of which was her utter inability to assist them.

Mr. Cuthbridge was the only human being to whom, at this time, she opened her heart unreservedly. His conviction of the profound rascality of Stephen Cornington enabled him to comprehend all the unhappiness of her situation ; and this was what no other individual could do.

She scrupled not to explain to him all the lamentable peculiarities of her marriage settlement, and made no secret of the engagement of her adopted child with Sir Herbert Otterborne, —which, as the embarrassed situation of his property was perfectly well known, was quite sufficient to explain how every way productive of misery this unfortunate settlement had become.

After one of these completely confidential conversations had lasted some time, and that the worthy priest had risen to take his leave, he stood for a moment looking at her earnestly, and

then he sat down again, and said, "An idea has just occurred to me, my good friend, which may be worth nothing ; and yet in your situation it would be wrong, I think, to throw it aside without consideration."

"God bless you for the interest you take in a miserable old woman, who, in honest truth, deserves a good deal of what she now suffers as a punishment for her self-willed folly. Let me hear what you would say, though I think you must have recourse to one of your Popish miracles before you can help me."

"Why do you call yourself old, Mistress Mary ?" said he. "Tell me exactly what your age is ?"

"Nearly fifty-two," she replied.

"And what is the age of your husband ?" said he.

"He is fifteen years older, I believe," was the reply.

"Then your case is not so utterly hopeless. In the course of nature you will survive your husband, and during that survivorship you will be in the receipt of the income that you enjoy together at present ?" said the priest.

"Yes !" she replied—"and that is precisely the argument which occurred to me when this hateful settlement was under discussion ; and it was upon the strength of this presumptuous argument that I proposed the terms which caused my poor father to shake his head so gravely, but which he afterwards acceded to, in order to content his wilful child."

"Contingencies should never be trusted to, if we have the power to avoid it ; but I cannot call the argument a presumptuous one," returned Mr. Cuthbridge. "It is reasonable to suppose that you should survive your husband, and therefore it is reasonable to act upon the supposition. It is quite evident, from all you have said to me, that your present unhappiness chiefly arises from your inability to assist your adopted child, she having engaged herself to a man so poor as to be unable to marry her without assistance. Now, if you were a widow, Mrs. Mathews, the thing would be very easy."

"Do you want to elicit a confession from me, Sir Priest, that I feel greatly desirous of being one ?"

"No, my good friend," he replied, gravely, "there could be no merit in such a confession as that. The fact is too self-evident. But all jesting apart, Mrs. Mathews, I feel very much disposed to advise that you should immediately act as nearly as possible as if you were already a widow."

"As how ?" she said—endeavouring to preserve her usual

look and manner, though her eye brightened, her cheek flushed, and even her voice trembled.

"Were I in your place," he replied, "I would leave my husband and take up my residence with Sir Herbert and the two Lady Otterbornes, at the Manor-house."

"A scheme which, as you well know, would be as full of pleasure, as my present existence is full of pain!" she replied; while the strong emotion produced by contemplating such a contrast, brought tears to her eyes.

"But what a strange position should I then hold in the opinion of my neighbours!" she added. "Even my kind friend, Lady Otterborne—do you really believe she would approve a household so strangely organised at the Manor-house, and so strangely disorganised at the Grange?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, decidedly not," he replied; "but your circumstances are very far from ordinary."

"As relates to my settlement, do you mean? As relates to my unfortunate inability of assisting my adopted daughter, excepting during my life? This might indeed appear to us to be a very tempting argument for my leaving my husband's house; but it could scarcely appear a satisfactory one in the opinion of the many who will sit in judgment on it," said Mrs. Mathews, shaking her head very despondingly.

"But this is not the argument which you ought to plead, either to yourself or others. There is another much more obvious, and much more available," replied Mr. Cuthbridge. "You would now, in the opinion of more people than you are aware of, be considered as justified in leaving your husband's house, if he persists in making it the home of his extremely ill-conducted grandson," he added.

"You forget, my good friend," said Mrs. Mathews,—longing to hear every word she uttered, contradicted; "you forget that this hateful young man is not known to everybody as he is to you."

"He is sufficiently known to justify you fully in telling Mr. Mathews that if Mr. Stephen Cornington is not sent out of the house, you and your young ward must leave it," replied Mr. Cuthbridge.

"And if I did this, would he not say, and would not many others echo him, that my poor Janet is no relation at all to me, but that this Cornington is to him?"

"Under the circumstances of the relationship, I do not think that even this could be pleaded with much force," said the

priest ; “but at any rate let me advise you to turn this proposal over in solitude. I will call again in a day or two, and then we will examine it together a little further”

And having said this, Mr Cuthbridge rose again,—and this time took his leave without any more last words. But he had already said enough to set the thoughts of poor Mrs. Mathews into a most troublesome ferment.



## CHAPTER LIV

Not many hours had elapsed after the Catholic priest had taken his departure, before a circumstance occurred which seemed to Mrs. Mathews almost like the special intervention of providence in her favour : for by the early post a London letter reached Mr. Stephen ; the purport of which he immediately communicated to his beloved grandfather, who in like manner communicated it, as in duty bound, to his beloved wife.

The purport of the letter, as communicated by Mr. Stephen, was to this effect ; namely, that the writer, who subscribed his name, “William White,” being a dear and intimate friend of the said Stephen, and finding himself within easy distance of the abode which was become his home, had determined upon renouncing and setting aside for the time being every other object in life, whether of pleasure or of business, for the exceeding pleasure and delight of paying him a visit ; and that if he, William White, heard nothing to the contrary, he should transport himself by railroad on the following Monday, to the station called Weldon-station,—which, as he calculated, would enable him to reach the mansion called the Grange, before the worthy family who resided there would be likely to go to dinner.

This information was given by Stephen to his grandfather with the air of one who brought intelligence which must of necessity be welcome ; nevertheless, a nice observer might have remarked that the young man’s complexion was heightened, and that there was an expression in his eye that looked as if he had been startled. It might have been terror, or it might

have been anger which caused it, or it might have been a mixture of both ; but Mr. Mathews only perceived a degree of eagerness, which caused him to reply without the delay of a moment, " Certainly, my dearest Stephen ! Of course ! any friend of yours, my dearest fellow ! Of course, we shall be delighted to see him ! "

But when this same interesting intelligence was communicated to the lady who still held the honoured post of mistress of the house, she betrayed very unequivocal symptoms of not being as much enchanted at hearing of this promised visit from the dear friend of Mr. Stephen, as his grandfather seemed to expect ; whereupon Mr. Mathews, who had never felt himself to be quite so great a man as he liked to be during the lifetime of the owner and master of the mansion, ventured for the first time in his life to look rather fiercely in the face of his lady, while he said to her with very unequivocal authority of tone,—

" I flatter myself, Mrs. Mathews, that I am, *at last*, really master of my own house, and as such I must, and do insist upon it, that the friends of my grandson are received and treated here as my friends,—as the friends, if you please to remember, of the *master of the house*."

This style was new to Mrs. Mathews.

That she felt greatly irritated is very certain ; but the only indication which she gave of not being well-pleased, was that she said nothing at all in reply.

Mr. Mathews felt that he was making an experiment,—and though sustained as he was by the consciousness of his power, and the noble spirit of his grandson to boot, he had no sort of doubt as to the final result of this struggle for power ; yet, nevertheless, he looked with some slight feeling of anxiety in the face of his lady, wishing to ascertain, perhaps, the degree of opposition he might have to combat.

But there was a sort of profound stillness in the expression of her features which puzzled him ; and well it might, for after feeling for an instant something approaching to an inclination to make him a speech in reply, she suddenly be-thought her of the counsel she had received from the priest ; and her husband's present mode of announcing the approach of Mr. Stephen's friend appeared to her to be one of the luckiest incidents imaginable.

Had Mr. Cuthbridge repeated his visit then, he would have found her in a much more courageous frame of mind than she

had been when, for the first time, she heard the suggestion of a separation from her husband and his grandson as a thing possible.

The *éclat* of such a proceeding had then shocked her ; but she now felt that it was very possible that there might be other things which would shock her more, and this threatened introduction of one of her grandson's dear friends as an inmate and daily companion for herself and Janet was one of these.

Had her friend, Mr. Cuthbridge, happened to have returned to her as immediately as he had promised to do, he would have found her well-disposed to follow the advice he had given, but accident prevented this ; and it was nearly a week before she saw him again.

And before this week was over, enough had happened to her, and enough had passed before her eyes, to render any doubt as to the following of this advice, impossible.

Mrs. Mathews and her Janet were seated together in the "Den" when Mr. White arrived ; but the event was made known to them by the entrance of Sally Spicer, who was evidently suffering under a very vehement degree of excitement. She had prepared herself, poor woman, to bear a great deal before she would torment her unfortunate mistress any more, by discussing any of the various causes of vexation, which day by day increased upon her under the sharp rule of the Stephen dynasty. But now it was evident that something had occurred which was beyond her power of endurance.

"Do you mean to let them do it, ma'am ?" said the panting Sally Spicer. "Do you mean to let this young villain run rampant over the house in this fashion ?"

"What are you talking of, Sally ?" said her mistress, with the sturdy composure of a person who has resolved upon strong measures, and who means not to idly waste any energy in talking about it. "Nothing lasts for ever, Sally ; and for the present you had better keep yourself quiet."

"But that is what I can't do !" replied Sally. "The villain has, with his own great hands, forced open the door of my dear old master's room, that his precious bully of a visitor may sleep there ! I had prepared the little chintz-room, which was as nice and as neat as hands could make it, but no sooner was the door opened to let in this new-comer's bags, boxes, and trunks, than the fellow who chose to call himself your grandson, Miss Mary, began swearing like a trooper because it was no bigger ! It has been big enough for his betters, or I will

never trust either my eyes, or my ears, again. But, no ! It was a *hole*, and a *box*, our precious grandson said ; and then he had the audacity to turn sharp round upon me, and to say, just as if he was a king speaking to a galley-slave, ‘Open old King’s door, Sally ! Let us look at that, if you please, and see if it isn’t fitter to lodge a gentleman than this d——d crib,’ I will leave you to guess, ma’am, whether ‘Sally’ obeyed him ; but whatever you may guess, Miss Mary, what I did do was to walk away without uttering a syllable, good, bad, or indifferent. But before I had gone three steps, *crush* went something behind me ; and when I turned to see what it was, there was my dear old master’s door,—by which none but them as set the room to rights has ever passed since he was carried through it,—there it stood wide open, with your old gentleman, ma’am, standing on one side and looking almost as much frightened as if he had been shot, and the two others holding their sides and laughing like mad. And then they set to, and dragged all this new fellow’s rubbish into the room, for neither of our two men put out a finger to help ‘em, and I can’t but say that I think it does ‘em honour.”

This statement was not listened to with quite so great an appearance of philosophy as Mrs. Mathews would have wished ; for she bit her nether lip and became crimson. But when she spoke it was only to repeat her own words, “Nothing lasts for ever, Sally.”

But this was so far from satisfying the indignant feelings of Mrs. Spicer, that her next words were uttered very solemnly indeed, “If you please, ma’am, I wish to give you warning.”

This seemed to be rather more than poor Mrs. Mathews could bear, for she drew forth her pocket-handkerchief and covered her face.

“Come with me, dear Sally ! Come with me for one moment !” said Janet, rising, and taking her by the arm ; and the now repentant Sally, who felt that her anger had made her forget herself, permitted the pale girl to lead her away without a shadow of opposition, though in going she swerved a little from the direct line, in order to approach her mistress, to whom she whispered in passing, “I did not mean *that* of course, Miss Mary !”

It was to her own room that Janet led the indignant Sally Spicer ; and having got her there and shut the door, Janet began scolding in her turn.

“You are very, *very* wrong ! You are very, *very* cruel !

Sally Spicer, to add to all the misery that my poor dear mamma is suffering, by talking to her in the way you have done ! And it seems very strange to me, Sally, if you really love her, that you should go on for so many years being kind to her when she was happy, and then to get into a passion and give her warning just when you know that she must be miserable ! ”

“ Oh ! what a way you put it in, Miss ! ” exclaimed Sally, fully awakened to a sense of her own misdeeds. “ Let me go back to her this very minute, Miss Janet, and offer my faithful service to her on my bended knees ? Give her warning, indeed ! —Bless her, dear soul ! she knows well enough that I would not leave her, not even if her beautiful grandson was to try to kick me out of doors ! ”

“ That is all very true, Sally ; I believe it perfectly, and so would your dear mistress too, for she would be the very last in the world to think that you would really wish to leave her. Depend upon it, Sally, Mrs. Mathews is not the sort of person to let herself be treated in this way. Let us trust to her. She deserves all our trust, as well as all our love ; and depend upon it, the best way of serving her will be to leave everything to herself, and to follow wherever she leads, without increasing her difficulties by any foolish attempts to do anything that we have not power to do effectually. What she said just now, you know, was very true. Things do not last for ever ; and, trust me, a favourable change and a speedy one, is much more likely to be brought about by her than either by you or by me.”

Never was a lecture better timed, or more effective. Sally Spicer grumbled no more ; nay, so completely did she seem to give way before all the violent innovations introduced by the three gentlemen who now held possession of the Grange, that it looked very much as if, in addition to all her respect for Janet’s preaching, she had in her memory the pithy old proverb which points out the final advantage of allowing a sufficient quantity of rope to a dog, when he is troublesome.

## CHAPTER LV

THE event which followed next was the presentation of this newly-arrived Mr. William White to the mistress of the mansion at which he had arrived, and to her adopted daughter.

This took place in the drawing-room, about three minutes before the dinner was announced. The ceremony was, of course, performed by Mr. Mathews, who sustained his courage under it manfully ; considering that he felt the while quite as fully aware as the ladies themselves could do, that the man he thus presented to them in the character of an honoured guest had no more the appearance or manners of a gentleman than a marker at a billiard-table, or a horse-jockey at a fair. But the infatuated gentleman knew it must be done, and he set about it with a degree of firm audacity that a little resembled desperation.

Yet Mr. William White was, for his age, which was about fifty, extremely handsome. That is to say, that his large features were perfectly regular and well-formed ; and though his dark hair was mingled with grey, it was still abundant, and still curled naturally. He wore a large, full moustache, which gave him a good deal the appearance of a foreigner ; and though when he spoke it was impossible to doubt his being an Englishman, he had now and then an accent, and now and then an expression, which showed that he must have lived a good deal in France. In stature, he was as tall as his dear friend Stephen,—and, like him, though perfectly well-proportioned, he was rather too stoutly framed to suggest any idea of elegance or grace.

Yet, notwithstanding his age, grey locks, and too athletic frame, he was still a splendidly handsome man. But he was also most unmistakably and most widely removed from bearing, either in appearance, accent, or manner, anything approaching the stamp of a gentleman.

His salutation to the two ladies, though probably intended to be very civil, was by no means particularly respectful, and twice before they had left the dining-table he had contrived to make Janet understand that he thought her extremely handsome, and that though no longer a young man, he was by no means old enough to be insensible to her attractions.

The second opportunity which he found for the communicating this interesting intelligence, was about three minutes after the cloth was removed ; but it was evident that both the ladies thought they had sat long enough, for after exchanging one single glance together, they both rose and left the room.

Now Mr. Mathews, though very decidedly a silly man, was not, either from association or habit, a vulgar one ; and notwithstanding his fanaticism of affection for his handsome grandson, he did not remain for a moment insensible to the fact that this dear grandson's dear friend was an extremely vulgar fellow. Nor was it without a painful twinge that he made the observation, and it certainly recalled to him, in a manner more accurate than agreeable, the style of persons with whom he had seen the grandmother of Stephen associate, and it could not, therefore, be fairly a matter either of blame, or of wonder, that the friends of the young man should, at least, occasionally be found among the same class.

The versatile talents and showy accomplishments of the handsome Stephen had more than atoned in the eyes of his grandfather for the want of finish, of which, perhaps, he was not quite insensible, though he would probably have been exceedingly indignant if any other person had pointed it out ; but even if Mr. William White had presented himself under the interesting name of a near relative, his atrocious vulgarity was too strongly marked to be overlooked in the same way.

But what was he to do ? If the same question had been put to his wife, it might have been answered without the least difficulty, and the answer would probably have been, "He must be got out of the house with the least possible delay, and if he makes any difficulty about going, we must send for a policeman." But had such words been uttered in the hearing of Mrs. Mathews it is not very easy to say what the result would have been. That the old gentleman was vehemently and extravagantly fond of his grandson is quite certain, and, moreover, notwithstanding the stain upon his birth, he was most wonderfully proud of him, proud of having such a grandson, proud to excess of being his grandfather.

Had he, some forty years earlier, married a lady of suitable age, and become the father of a legitimate progeny, such a feeling as was now inspired by the sight of Stephen Cornington could never have existed. But though exceedingly well pleased by his union with the heiress of Weldon Grange, he was quite aware that he had married an old maid,—and not being quite

unconscious that he was himself an old bachelor, his ruling passion, which, beyond all question, was personal vanity, was wounded by feeling that not all his personal grace, not all his hospitable propensities, and not even his now handsome income, could prevent his new home from having a rather dowdy and quizzical air.

But the arrival of this splendid grandson had completely removed the reproach, and a good deal of the old gentleman's devotion to Mr. Stephen Cornington may be attributed to this.

Then came the delightful conviction that the handsome youth was equally devoted to him, and then the fond persuasion that the resemblance between them was so great, as to render it almost impossible to look at the grandson without feeling an admiring conviction of what the grandfather must once have been! And all this together brought on the habit of indulging him, till by degrees, and not very slow degrees either, this habit became too strong to be easily resisted; and most assuredly it was something very like a fear of offending Stephen which induced the poor old gentleman to endure such a guest as Mr. William White.

Endure him, however, he did; and when on returning to the drawing-room, he found no ladies to receive them there, but instead of the presence of his wife he was greeted by a message from her, stating that she was not quite well, and that tea should be sent into the gentlemen; he exerted himself strenuously to convince both Stephen and his large friend, that the indisposition of the lady made no difference in the world, and that he only hoped that they would set about making themselves comfortable in any way they liked.

He proposed cards, and he proposed billiards, and then he proposed that his dear Stephen should open the pianoforte, and regale them with some of his charming imitative performances.

"Which, if you have never heard them," said Mr. Mathews rubbing his hands, and trying to look in particularly high spirits, "will make you die with laughing."

"My service to you, Sir, but I have no wish for it," replied Mr. William White, almost as solemnly as if declining any other sort of death. "And as to cards or billiards with him there would be no sport in that,—would there, Stephen?"

"Perhaps not," replied the young man, colouring; "there is no fun in playing with intimate friends."

"Besides, to say the truth," added Mr. White, "I feel a little in the same way as your old lady,—that is to say, you know, a little touch of headache; and there is nothing I should like so well as going up into my own sleeping-room, and taking my old acquaintance with me. I have lots of things that I want to say to him,—so if you will let me have a good bit of fire up there, and a jug of hot water, with a bottle of spirits and some sugar, we can have our talk and be in nobody's way."

Mr. Mathews immediately rang the bell; saying, however, as he did so,—

"As to your being in anybody's way, Mr. White, I hope you will not conceive anything of the sort to be possible. My house is always open to my own friends, and, of course, to the friends of my dear grandson also. The accident of Mrs. Mathews' being unwell, cannot, I assure you, make any difference whatever."

"That's your sort, Sir!" replied Mr. William White, with a broad grin. "You are a fine old fellow, and it does you honour to speak out after that fashion, for your madam does not look like the very meekest of God's creatures."

And then the facetious stranger laughed aloud, Mr. Mathews making a strong effort to join in his mirth. But the effort, as it seemed, was not very successful; for his lively new acquaintance, after looking at him for a moment, laughed again, and said,—

"You ought to bribe us, old gentleman, not to tell of you; for the mare, you know, will sometimes be the better horse, let us do what we can to prevent it. But if I was you, Mr. Mathews, I should try to get a kiss now and then from that devilish pretty girl that your old dragon has got with her. That girl suits my taste to a nicety."

"It is lucky then, that she does not suit mine," said Stephen, brutally; "but, for my part, I hate the very sight of her."

"Well, Master Stephen, there is no accounting for taste," rejoined his friend, "and at any rate we shan't quarrel on that point. And now let's be jogging. The hot water can come after us. So I wish you a sound sleep, and no curtain-lectures to disturb it."

And having said these words, with the addition of a good loud laugh, he rolled his enormous person out of the room, and was immediately followed by his friend Stephen.

## CHAPTER LVI.

"You know the road better than I do," said Mr. William White, standing aside to let Stephen pass him. "Lead on to your own sleeping-room, young master; that's where I want to go to."

Stephen obeyed,—and they were presently in the very comfortable apartment allotted to the grandson of Mr. Mathews.

Stephen, as he entered, immediately closed the door after him, but Mr. William White did not appear to think this precaution sufficient to secure their privacy—for first with his own massive hand he locked the door, and then taking a candle in his hand, he opened two cupboards, to ascertain that they were not inhabited, and then, dropping upon one knee, he thrust the candle under the bed, in order to convince himself that no listener was sheltered there. Having satisfied himself on this point, he took a deliberate survey of the premises, and spying out a comfortable-looking arm-chair that stood beside the bed, he conveyed it to the chimney-corner; and having stirred the fire, and thrown on it a copious supply of coals, he seated himself, and stretching his enormous length of limb across the hearth, he said,—

"Now then, Master Stephen, you sit down there exactly opposite to me, for I like to look into your handsome face when my intention is to cross-examine you. You shall mix a stiff tumbler for me presently, but I have two or three questions to ask before we get to that."

"And I have got two or three questions to ask on my side," cried Stephen fiercely; "and I'll have them answered too, were you ten times            were you a hundred times over what you are."

"You need not go to your multiplication table, Master Stephen, to express either your courage or your impudence. Being what I am, *once* will be quite enough for you."

"Now tell me, then," said the young man with savage sternness,—yet not without some symptoms of fear too, as he looked at the powerful features of his gigantic visitor,—"now tell me, if you can, what devil or devil's imp it was which inspired you with the mad thought of coming after me here."

"Devils' imps, you know, are all friendly to their masters, Stephen,—and it was a friendly imp that sent me here. And take my word for it, Master Stephen, it was no mad thought that brought me here, but a thought very particularly the reverse. I was as sober as a judge, and as wise as Solomon, when I determined to come here," replied the visitor.

"You are likely to find yourself most lamentably out in your reckoning," replied the angry boy; "but it would serve you right to let you go on right ahead, till you get into such rough water as might chance to give you just what you deserved."

"You do not express yourself at all respectfully, Stephen, or by many degrees so much like a gentleman as your accounts of yourself had led me to hope that I should find you," said Mr. White. "However, as my affairs are rather of a pressing nature, I will postpone for the present the lecture which you seem so greatly to require on the article of proper respect. I am come here, dearly-beloved, for the purpose of receiving from your dutiful and affectionate hands, the largest sum of money which it will be possible for you to procure me. And if your means fail, I shall not shrink from giving you a little help, my boy. The fact is, Stephen, that you are in capital good quarters for such a job,—and I am in no condition, I can tell you, to let that or any other good chance slip by me."

"A good chance, indeed?" replied Stephen; "why, if you would but leave me alone, it would be an absolute certainty, and a certainty more than you ever dreamed of in your life. I stand at this moment," he continued, "with this house and two thousand a year settled upon me as firmly as the law can settle it, if you are not mad enough to come in the way and prevent it."

"And it would be a mad act to do, if there was not a reason for it worth more than two thousand a year," returned the other. "The law, you say, my dear, will take care of you, if I don't prevent it; and I may say just the same words to you, Stephen, in return,—the law will settle my business for me, if you do not come in the way and prevent it. I have made a troublesome little blunder lately, my dear Stephen. I have written another man's name, by mistake, instead of my own. A few years ago I should have been hanged for it; but now, if I am caught, I shall be only transported for life."

"Did you get the money?" demanded Stephen, eagerly.

"Yes, my dear, I got the money, every shilling of it; and it might have helped me to run off with itself,—as you told me in

your letters that a beautiful young heiress was going to do with you ; only that here again is a striking likeness between us,—for you have lost the lady, and I have lost the money."

"Lost it!" exclaimed Stephen, looking petrified.

"Yes, my dear ; I lost it at HAZARD," replied his gigantic companion, affecting a stultified look of innocence that might have well become a five-year-old baby of Brobdignag.

"I presume, Sir," said the young man, "from your manner of speaking, that you are indulging in a joke at my expense ; but before you go on to explain it, I greatly wish that you would permit me to relate, in the shortest manner possible, the real situation in which I stand, which I faithfully promise to do without indulging in any joke at all."

"It may be, dearly-beloved Stephen, that there may be quite as much of gravity in my history as in yours. But patience is the virtue of ripe age ; impatience the folly of unripe youth. I will, therefore, submit to listen to your story before I insist upon your listening to mine ; but make it as short as you can, my dear boy, for trust me there is no joke in what I will afterwards tell you."

Stephen looked at him earnestly for a moment, and took his cue from the expression of a countenance with which he was well acquainted, and which indicated with sufficient plainness that this was, in truth, no fitting season for jesting.

"There never was a more successful letter written," began the young man, "than that of my grandmother to Mr. Mathews. It opened his heart to me directly ; and from the first hour in which he read it, up to the present moment, he has made it evident that the claim which her letter gave me upon his affections superseded every other feeling of his heart. He was, I believe, living upon very good terms with his wife when I arrived ; but it was easy enough for me to see that I soon became, in his eyes, a person of much greater importance than wife or father-in-law either. Nor did he leave me long in ignorance of the agreeable position in which I stood. It seems that when he first heard the agreeable news that he was a grandfather, he covenanted with the lady he was going to marry, and with the father likewise, that his own property should, after the death of his wife, devolve to this grandson. The lady consented to this, but upon condition that during the lives both of her father and her husband she should enjoy the independent possession of five hundred a year ; and, moreover, provided this were granted, she offered, having no relations of her own, to

permit Mr. Mathews to dispose of the joint property, provided that in case of her surviving her father and her husband she should have the enjoyment of the whole income during her life ; and it is thus that the settlement now stands."

Stephen ceased, and his companion having listened to him very attentively, remained in silent rumination for a minute or two, after he had finished his statement.

At length he said, but in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "Then, if Mr. and Mrs. Mathews were to be both dead to-morrow, you, Stephen Cornington, would be the owner of this place and of two thousand a-year?"

"Yes!" replied Stephen, distinctly. But he, too, spoke in a whisper.

And then they both remained silent for several minutes.

"My position, Stephen, is a very ticklish one," said Mr. William White, drawing a long breath. It is as well, I believe, to make you understand the whole truth at once. If I am caught I shall be tried, and transported for life as certainly as I am sitting before you now. I daresay you know a good deal more about London and its ways than your beloved grandfather gives you credit for; but yet I really doubt if you know enough to make you fully understand the sort of position in which a fellow in my cursed condition finds himself when he is obliged to go there without twenty shillings in his pocket. If I could once quit the country, I should be safe enough; but this is not to be done without money, and money, my dear boy, I must have. You understand me, Stephen. Go your own way to work. Manage the job just as you like best; but money, young gentleman, I must have, and you must procure it for me."

"And I swear, before God and all his saints, and the blessed Mary to boot, that if your life, and my life too, depended upon it, I could not procure you twenty pounds," replied Stephen, without a shadow of bullying, and looking deadly pale.

"That makes no difference whatever, Stephen, and that you know as well as I do. Necessity has no law but its own. The thing must be done, and, doubtless, there are many ways of doing it. I am perfectly well disposed to leave the choice to you. The thing must be done, and you must do it. The manner *how*, I leave to your choice, and the time *when* shall depend upon circumstances. There are many circumstances in my position here extremely favourable to my concealment, and I have no objection whatever to my indulging myself with a

little breathing time. But this must be done with caution. However, if nothing occurs to startle me, I think that I may venture upon remaining here for three days. They won't get wind of me easily. But I will risk it no longer, Master Stephen. By this hour, on Thursday next, I must receive from your hands the sum of five hundred pounds ; unless, indeed, accident should be likely to put you with tolerable brevity, and with tolerable certainty, into the possession of your fine inheritance. In that case, I would take ten pounds and a labourer's frock, and beg my way, you know, down to Scotland, trusting to the future. I could embark there easy enough, in a fishing-boat. But this is only a *hint*. I shall expect your answer to-morrow, and I will come here for it."

Having said these words, he ceased, and remained with his large wide open eyes fixed upon the pallid face opposite to him, with a sort of mocking solemnity that had all the horror of tragedy, and all the coarseness of comedy in it.

He looked like a huge demon, cast in iron ; while Stephen looked like a familiar, who, though admitted to a knowledge of the most hideous sins—nay, graciously permitted to participate in their perpetration—was still but an imp, and treated with a good deal of familiar scorn accordingly.

Twice he attempted to speak in reply to the imperative command thus laid upon him, and twice he failed to articulate a syllable, literally from not having breath to speak.

Mr. William White smiled, with a little scorn, perhaps, but showed no violent symptoms of indignation—though this silence certainly appeared to be singularly inconvenient, considering the critical situation of the individual who was awaiting his reply.

" You have not words, or you have not breath, or you have not strength, or you have not courage, to answer me," said the iron man. " You are a fine-looking fellow, Stephen, considering that you are but a boy ; but a little degenerate, I am afraid—a little degenerate. However, it matters not," he added, rising from his chair ; " you have heard me, which is more important than my now hearing you. I suspect, that if at this moment you had strength to speak, I should hear nothing nobler from you than assurances that what I have asked is impossible. But night thoughts are sometimes wise thoughts, and they may, probably, prove so in your case ; for it is likely enough that you may remember, in the snug solitude of your own chamber, that what I ask I COMMAND ! "

And having said this, he took his candle, bent his head very graciously in farewell, and opened the door. He paused, however, for a moment, ere he passed through it, and said, "The first door, I believe?" and then Stephen roused himself sufficiently to utter "Yes," and in the next moment the door was closed upon him, and he was left alone.



## CHAPTER LVII.

EARLY on the following morning, Mrs. Mathews paid a visit to Janet, in her bed-room. "I am come to consult you, my dear child," said she, noiselessly closing the door. "It has not very often happened to me, Janet, to feel so much in doubt as I do at this minute as to what I ought to do. You know the advice which my old friend, Mr. Cuthbridge, has given me. You know what the objections were, and are, against my accepting it. Mr. Cuthbridge is to call on me again, in order to discuss the subject further, and to learn my decision; but I do not expect him till to-morrow. Now the fact is, Janet, that the arrival of this horrible man has gone far towards convincing me that Mr. Cuthbridge is right, and that my first duty is to remove you from a house that is no longer fit to be your home. What I come now to consult upon is, whether it will be better for us to throw ourselves upon the hospitality of Lady Otterborne at once, by our walking across the park immediately, before the two *gentlemen* descend to breakfast, or whether it will not be more dignified and more wise to await another visit from Mr. Cuthbridge, state to him the new adventure that has befallen us, and then to act as he may advise?"

Janet listened very attentively to this long speech, for her young head was working too, upon the decidedly puzzling question as to whether it were better for poor, harassed Mrs. Mathews to endure her home, or to run away from it.

"Our thoughts, dear mother, have been working upon the same question, probably as much as they could have been had we passed the night together, and the result of my meditations is, that you had better wait for another visit from Mr. Cuth-

bridge. One reason for my thinking so is, that I suspect we are both of us too much under the influence of anger and disgust for our judgment upon the all-important subject of separation to have fair play. Mr. Cuthbridge is more likely to be in his sober senses."

"Perhaps, Janet, you will think that I have indeed lost every sense that deserves to be called sober, when I confess to you that I not only feel disgust, but *fear*. If my life depended upon it, I could not tell you what it is I fear, and yet I can give no other name to the sensation that torments me," said Mrs. Mathews, with a sort of shudder that made her companion smile.

"Then if such be your condition," said Janet, "I most strongly recommend your taking no decisive step till you have some one of stouter heart than mine to counsel you. Do not run from your house in terror, my dear mother, because a very tall, very stout, very vulgar man came to visit Mr. Stephen Cornington."

"Then, while we wait for a more sober-minded judgment than mine to direct us, let us condescend to soothe our irritated feelings by a sort of half-measure," replied Mrs. Mathews.

"Well, dearest, and what shall the half-measure be?" said Janet.

"Why, let us boldly walk down to breakfast," returned her friend, "and let us soberly and courageously meet the big man again; and after breakfast, when the *gentlemen* have determined how they will dispose of themselves for the morning, we will watch our opportunity, and quietly creep across the park to our refuge. And then we will tell them all about it, Janet. There will be no danger, I think, of our meeting the party at the Manor-house. I do not believe Mr. Mathews will be disposed to introduce his new friend there. Do you?"

The reply to this was so gay a smile, as to strengthen the nerves of Mrs. Mathews considerably, so much so, indeed, that she jested upon her own terrors very sarcastically, and when the breakfast-bell rang, the two ladies made their appearance arm-in-arm, and saluted the strange guest with the most dignified politeness and composure.

It was perhaps fortunate that they did so, for there was a shadow lowering on the brow of Mr. William White as they entered the room; but it vanished instantly upon receiving the salutation of his hostess.

The manner of this man, too, was much less offensive than

it had been on the preceding night ; for though he sat exactly opposite to Janet, he never once fixed his eyes upon her face.

This was a great relief to her, and moreover it left her at liberty to look at him, which a strong feeling of curiosity prompted her to do, and she now ventured to indulge it. But of this, Mr. William White did not appear to be at all conscious. He was evidently pre-occupied ; but though perfectly civil, he was more quiet than conversable, and by way of accounting for this, he said that he had been travelling a great deal lately, and that he was still feeling the fatigue arising from it.

In answer to a polite proposal from Mr. Mathews, that if he liked it he could lend him a horse, and take him to see some of the prettiest scenery in the county, he said that he believed he had no great taste for scenery, and that it would better suit him to sit in an easy chair and read the newspaper.

Nevertheless, he seemed to feel some little interest about the horse which was offered for his use, for he asked if it was a tolerably quick goer.

The easy chair, which it was evident Mr. William White liked best, was the one he had sat in on the preceding evening, in Stephen's room, and his young friend indulged him in this predilection, as soon as it was expressed ; and accordingly it was there that they established themselves, and there that they remained till very nearly the hour of dinner.

What Mr. Mathews did with himself was not very well known to anybody ; but Sally Spicer said that she thought he had shut himself into his own room, for she had met him coming up the stairs, and that he said to her as he passed that he was afraid he was going to have a headache.

Mrs. Mathews and Janet meanwhile persevered in their intention of walking to the Manor-house,—where the intended consultation took place, very much to the satisfaction of all the parties engaged in it ; for it was agreed, without a dissentient voice, that nothing could be so easy, and that certainly nothing could be so agreeable, as that they should both take up their abode at the Manor-house as long as the big man remained at the Grange ; but, nevertheless, the courage of Mrs. Mathews being restored by the peaceable demeanour of the big man during breakfast, and by the facility with which she had transported herself and Janet beyond his reach, she was fain to confess that she did not really believe that there was anything to be afraid of, unless it were that the said big man should take it into his head to stare at Janet again.

"That, at least, is decidedly my own concern," said Sir Herbert; "and therefore I must beg to have a vote in the business. I don't like that my Janet should be stared at by the big man, and I don't think she would particularly like it herself; therefore, my very dear friend, I will beg as a most especial favour that when you have had enough of us you would let me escort you home again across the park, leaving Janet to pass the day with my mother."

"Well, Sir Herbert, I suppose I must consent. It is evident that you are jealous of our big man, and who shall say what may happen if I refuse?"

In consequence, therefore, of this arrangement, Mrs. Mathews returned to the Grange escorted by Herbert, leaving Janet *tête-à-tête* with his mother.

"Do, dearest! tell me something more of this strange visitor?" said Lady Otterborne, as soon as they were left alone. "I am quite sure there must be something very extraordinary about him, for our dear Mrs. Mathews is not a person to be alarmed for nothing in the way which it is evident happened to her last night."

"I do not really think that she positively feared danger from him," replied Janet. "It is not very likely, you know, that this favourite grandson should really bring anybody into the house to rob and murder us. But if not absolutely alarming, there must be always something startling, I think, in what is both out of place and unexpected. Unexpected the arrival of this man most certainly was, for we had never heard of his existence before; and could you see him you would understand, dear Lady Otterborne, better than any description of mine could make you, how completely out of place this man appears in the house of a gentleman."

"Was his dress particularly strange?" said Lady Otterborne.

"I cannot tell you," replied Janet, "for I do not know how he was dressed; but I suppose it was strange, because everything about him seemed strange."

"Was he very ugly?" demanded her friend.

"No!" returned Janet, very decisively; "and now I will tell you the strangest thing of all. Instead of being ugly, I really believe that he was very handsome, only very tall and very large; but—" and there she stopped.

"But what, Janet? Why should there be anything strange in the man's being handsome?" said Lady Otterborne.

"Nothing!" was Janet's reply. "There is nothing strange

in his being handsome, for you may see handsome people in all stations, and ugly people, too. No! no! The strangeness was not in his being handsome, but in his being so very like his dear friend, Mr. Stephen! But Mrs. Mathews did not see it."

"Then I presume, Janet," replied Lady Otterborne, "that this strange resemblance must have been a fancy of yours?"

"No! no!" again ejaculated Janet, "I am sure it was no fancy. I am a portrait sketcher, you know, Lady Otterborne, and I think I know what constitutes a real, and not a fanciful likeness. In short, dear lady, my private conviction is that they are nearly related."

"Nay, then, my dear, that may account for the hospitable reception which our good, silly Mr. Mathews has given him; and instead of appearing strange, I think it removes the strangeness," said Lady Otterborne.

"But if he be a relative, why not avow it?" said Janet.

"He may have avowed it to Mr. Mathews, perhaps," replied her friend.

"True," returned Janet; and here the conversation dropped, for Herbert now joined them, and they were at no loss to find themes of deeper interest to talk of than any which Stephen Cornington or his friend could furnish.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

SCARCELY had Mrs. Mathews reseated herself in the "Den" when Mr. Cuthbridge made his appearance at the door of it, and was received with something like a shout of welcome. "Ah! you know not how much you have been wished for, Sir Priest!" she exclaimed. "We have had an adventure since your last visit, which has, I think, very nearly determined me to follow your advice."

"If it be not a very bad adventure, I think I shall be glad of it," he replied, "for I shall rejoice at anything which changes your present position—I do not like it. Now, then! —Tell me all about it."

She did tell him all about it ; and after meditating in silence for a moment, he said,

“ I should like to see the man.”

“ And I shall like that you should see him,” she replied : “ and nothing can be more easy,” she added. “ You have only to stay and dine here. It will be an especial kindness to me if you will do so, for Janet is with Lady Otterborne, and will not return till I send the carriage for her in the evening.”

“ Then I will stay and dine with you,” said Mr. Cuthbridge, gravely, “ though it is possible my pious penitent may not be particularly well pleased to see me. Do not let anybody, not even the faithful Sally, know that I am here. Neither she, nor anyone else, I think, saw me enter. Where do you suppose this guest of Mr. Stephen’s may be at present ? ”

“ I know not,” she replied, “ for I am but just returned from the Manor-house. But you will be perfectly out of sight if you remain here. Master Stephen himself has never yet crossed this threshold, and I do not think he is likely to attempt it to-day.”

In order to make the matter sure, however, it was agreed between them that Mrs. Mathews should leave him in solitary possession of the room, the door of which he might very safely lock without creating any suspicion that it contained a prisoner ; for Mrs. Mathews very frequently secured her door on leaving this room, in order to protect her widely-scattered papers from the neat arrangement of the housemaid.

Mr. Cuthbridge gave a very cordial consent to this arrangement ; for he felt a strong suspicion that his penitent would prefer a solitary ramble, and the loss of his dinner, to meeting him at the table.

Mrs. Mathews, therefore, left him, and carried her book and her work into the drawing-room ; but her usually tranquil state of spirits had been too much disturbed to permit her occupying herself either by book or work, and as the setting sun still shed a bright gleam over the lawn, she enveloped herself in the ever-ready shawl which hung in the hall, and strolled out into the garden.

The evening was as mild as a January evening could well be, but nevertheless she fancied that she should like the path in the kitchen-garden, which was sheltered by the east side of the house, to her usual favourite walk round the lawn. Having reached this sheltered path, she began to meditate on the strange position in which she found herself.

"If any living woman could have been justified in thinking herself safe from adventures I might have been so, one short year ago," thought she, mournfully enough,—"yet what is my condition now? I am frightened, I scarcely know why; yet frightened I most certainly am, and so is poor Janet too; and the vagueness of our fears, though it ought to suggest the probability that they are unfounded, only renders our condition more painful! And my poor silly husband, too! I feel sure that he is under the same influence, though he affects, poor soul, to look so particularly light-hearted and gay. Who is this monster-man that has come down upon us?—and why should that usually audacious boy appear so greatly cowed by his presence?"

While asking herself these unanswerable questions, Mrs. Mathews passed more than once under the window of Stephen Cornington's room.

When she first passed, she forgot her vicinity to it; but when she passed again, she trod lightly,—for Sally Spicer had told her, upon her return from the Manor-house, that Mr. Stephen and his strange companion had been shut up together in that room all the morning. But when she passed the third time no such precaution seemed necessary, for the deep-toned voice of the stranger was suddenly raised to so passionate a key as to render it pretty nearly impossible that any sound from without could have arrested the attention of those within the room.

And again, poor lady, she felt the painful influence of fear, though still without any rational reason for supposing that danger threatened her. It was tolerably certain, indeed, that her husband's usually audacious grandson was at that moment under the discipline of angry language from his companion, but there was nothing in this likely to affect her nerves very painfully; yet still the sounds frightened her, and, though with no intention whatever of listening, she stood as immovably still beneath the window as if the rough tones had fascination in them, and kept her chained there.

She could not, however, distinguish a single word; if she could have done so, she would have certainly moved on, for it would have required that a much more positive danger should threaten her before she would have been tempted to play the part of eavesdropper.

But at length, however, having stood trembling within reach of these angry but inarticulate sounds for some minutes, she distinctly heard the words, "*Stephen, it must be done!*" for

they were pronounced not only in a loud key, but slowly and distinctly.

And then she very literally "started like a guilty thing," and walked off; but not so swiftly, however, as to escape hearing the cautious opening of the window under which she had been standing.

Her hasty and incautious step in retreating had undoubtedly been heard, and her figure had as undoubtedly been recognised; for though the twilight had faded into darkness, there was a bright crescent high in the heavens which gave quite sufficient light for this purpose.

Poor Mrs. Mathews was exceedingly annoyed by this. In the first place she greatly disliked the imputation which must evidently rest upon her, of creeping about the house in the darkness of night for the purpose of listening to the conversation of her guests, which it was particularly evident, from the scene they had chosen, it was not intended for her to hear.

And moreover the words she had thus unintentionally heard, as well as the tone in which they were spoken, conveyed the idea of a threat too distinctly for her, in the present excited state of her imagination, to listen to them without alarm.

She was, however, very considerably comforted by remembering that Mr. Cuthbridge was to dine with her. And had it been otherwise, she would have been tempted to commit the further imprudence of absenting herself from table; for she could not conceal from her own heart the disagreeable fact that the sort of steady passive courage which had hitherto seemed to make a very essential part of her character, had utterly forsaken her now; and had Janet been with her at that moment, she would have shown herself by far the greater heroine of the two.

The poor lady had by this time had quite walking enough in the cool moonshine, and she re-entered the house with as little delay as possible, but feeling much less like its mistress than like a culprit, who might be turned out again at very short notice, if it pleased her guests so to dispose of her.

But it was not the unexpected arrival, or the strange appearance, or the uncouth manners of Mr. William White which could so suddenly have subdued her courage, had not the previous conduct of Stephen Cornington prepared the way for this alarm.

From the time of her father's death, the young man had so

completely assumed the tone of a master, and her poor husband so completely that of a subdued and brow-beaten old man, that this sudden appearance on the scene of such an individual as Mr. William White, in the character of Mr. Stephen Cornington's particular friend, might reasonably have alarmed any one who had no stouter protectors than Sally Spicer, Janet Anderson, and poor old pale-looking Mr. Mathews himself.

But now, though greatly annoyed, she remembered with exceeding satisfaction that Mr. Cuthbridge was waiting for her in the "Den;" and notwithstanding his tonsure and cassock, there was perhaps no man of her acquaintance that she would have accepted as her champion in his place.

As she entered the house, she met the footman in the act of carrying the soup into the dining-room, and she lost not a moment in mounting to her "Den," giving the expected signal, and hastening down-stairs again to the dressing-room, accompanied by the priest.

The only person they found in the room was Mr. Mathews; and never in his life had he evinced so much satisfaction at the sight of this reverend gentleman. Mrs. Mathews had felt considerable doubts as to his being cordially welcomed. She had fancied that her husband might have felt painfully ashamed of the appearance and manners of the ruffian-like giant who was his guest, when presenting him to a person so highly distinguished for his polished demeanour as was the learned ecclesiastic; but nothing could be less like this than was now the expression of his countenance. It was impossible to mistake the feeling with which he now welcomed the librarian of Proctor Castle. It was joyous, it was thankful, it was the manner of a man relieved from great anxiety: yet after this first emotion had been felt and enjoyed, some less agreeable sensations evidently succeeded to it. For then he looked anxiously in the face of his wife, as if to consult with her how to proceed.

Greatly comforted, however, on her side, by perceiving that the presence of a gentleman and a friend was welcome to her husband, she answered his appealing look by saying, "I know that dinner is ready, Mr. Mathews, because I saw the soup carried in. You had better send to Mr. Stephen's room, I think, and let the gentlemen know that we are waiting for them."

This proposal was immediately acted upon; and a servant was sent up-stairs, who performed his errand by stoutly

thumping at Stephen's door, and pronouncing aloud the words, "Dinner's ready!"

There was no civility in the accent, or the manner of the summons, which was only a small testimony to the unquestionable fact, that no class is more speedily and more vehemently disgusted by the marked absence of gentle bearing in any who assume the rank of gentlemen than the hirelings who wait upon them. It should seem as if the aversion to such was altogether instinctive, and dictated by some compulsive law of nature.

No spoken answer was heard to this summons ; but after the interval of a minute or two, the heavy tread of the stranger was heard upon the stairs,—and he presently entered the drawing-room, followed by Stephen.

The room was not well lighted, one solitary lamp having been placed upon the centre table ; and at first catching sight of a masculine addition to the party, Mr. William White very perceptibly started.

Mr. Mathews made no movement demonstrative of any intention of introducing the strangers to each other ; but Stephen instantly took the office upon himself,—and after bowing with an air of the most profound deference to the priest, pronounced the name of "Mr. William White," adding, "He is a dear friend of mine, reverend father."

But not even this conciliatory appellation of "reverend father" produced any very cordial salutation in return on the part of the priest : he stiffly, and in the least possible degree, inclined his head in recognition of Stephen, but without appearing to have been aware that the stranger had been presented to him.

The party sat down in very perfect silence, Mrs. Mathews indicating to Mr. Cuthbridge, by a slight movement of her hand, that he was to place himself beside her on the right, which he did : upon which, Mr. William White seated himself on the same side of the table, and Stephen opposite to him. Whereupon Mr. Cuthbridge, observing that he wished to avoid the fire, got up, and placed himself on the left of Mrs. Mathews, by which manœuvre he was opposite to Mr. William White, which was where he intended to be.

That bulky individual was obviously not quite at his ease ; for though Mr. Mathews made sundry small attempts at conversation with him, his reply rarely exceeded a monosyllable. As to Stephen, he spoke not a word to anyone ; and the man

who waited told Sally Spier that he did not know what was come over "the *grandson*,"—which was the appellation constantly bestowed upon him in the kitchen—for that he was turning sometimes red, and sometimes pale like a girl; that he spoke not a word, and hardly eat a morsel.

Mrs. Mathews and the priest, meanwhile, continued to converse a little, but by no means after their usual fashion; for nothing could be much more unmeaning than the little speeches they made to each other.

Mr. Cuthbridge, however, eat a very good dinner,—but he was the only one of the party who did; for Mr. Mathews, instead of eating, looked very much like a man in a dream, who had the disagreeable habit of sleeping with his eyes open. That he was ill at ease, however, was made evident by an occasional deep sigh: this was breathed at pretty regular intervals, and seemed to be the result of the cogitations which had occupied him while the said intervals lasted.

It was not likely that a party so constituted should sit unnecessarily long at table; and Mrs Mathews rose very soon after the cloth was removed, saying to the priest, as she did so, "You shall find coffee ready for you, Mr Cuthbridge, whenever you like to join me in the drawing-room."

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## CHAPTER LIX.

THIS invitation was very soon accepted by the individual to whom it was specially addressed; but the other gentlemen did not follow her immediately. The port-wine of Mr. Mathews was very good port-wine; and it is probable that Mr. William White thought that it was likely to do him good.

Mrs. Mathews and her father confessor, as she often called the friendly ecclesiastic, were therefore left at perfect liberty to discuss the very singular situation of the household. She began by describing to him her adventure in the garden, and he made her repeat the words she had heard, desiring her, as nearly as possible to describe the tone and accent with which they were spoken.

"*Stephen, it must be done!*"—though uttered very slowly, and

even very solemnly, might certainly be addressed to the young man by an old friend, without justifying any suspicion that the parties between whom they passed were laying a plot to rob the house, or murder the inhabitants.

"Besides," observed Mr. Cuthbridge, very reasonably, "even presuming that this very vulgar individual were the most accomplished rogue in existence, he would scarcely choose to make the home of his young, and evidently very intimate friend, the scene of his nefarious operations; nor is it at all likely that Stephen would risk leaving his present home, and the valuable inheritance of his devoted grandfather, in order to accommodate his old acquaintance by assisting him in such a scheme."

"True, O priest!" returned Mrs. Mathews, with renovated courage,—"nor have I ever been, I think, so very wild in my speculations, as to imagine such an adventure probable. My alarm has arisen, I believe, solely from the *strangeness* of the circumstances by which we are surrounded. If this Mr. White had been somewhat less unlike the people we are accustomed to associate with, this effect would not have been produced, and I should not now be gravely asking your opinion as to the propriety of sleeping to-night in my own house, or of running away and sleeping somewhere else. But there is something so startling in the brutal roughness of his appearance, and the vulgarity of his intonation and manner, that I have perhaps mistaken astonishment for terror, and it may be that I was only bewildered when I fancied that I was frightened."

"Likely enough, my good friend," replied Mr. Cuthbridge; "and now let us talk a little reasonably. While you have been amusing your poetical imagination by sketching a fine scene of murder and robbery, I have been meditating on the very miserable prospect that seems opening before you and your dear little Janet, from the unlimited freedom with which Mr. Mathews' illegitimate progeny can invite such guests as the present to your house; and the result of my visit to you to-day, is a strong conviction that this house is no longer a fitting home for either of you. It is not that I think you in the least danger of being murdered; Mr. Mathews' adored grandson is a vast deal too well off in his grandpapa's house, to render his joining in such a plot at all probable. It is infinitely more likely that the words you heard referred to the introducing some nearly related ladies to your acquaintance. But let it mean what it will, the obvious fact is, that laws promulgated by Mr.

William White, and brought into execution by Mr. Stephen Crampton, are not laws to which you ought to be subjected. Depend upon it, I should not give you such advice lightly, but my decided opinion is, that you must leave Mr. Mathews and his progeny. Your happily independent five hundred a year will enable you to do this; and so important do I think this advantage now, that I am almost reconciled to the preposterous terms you gave to obtain it."

Mrs. Mathews listened to all this with the deepest attention and it would have been difficult to find any theme more likely to calm the agitation of her spirits.

"Your eloquence is irresistible," she replied; "I will no longer be afraid of murder by night, or MRS. GRUNDY by day. Let people abuse me if they will, I must bear it,—and it will be easier to bear *that* than the society of—"

But here a movement was heard at the dining-room door, and in the next moment Mr. Mathews, his grandson, and his grandson's guest entered the drawing-room.

Scarcely had the party seated themselves, when a loud ringing was heard at the door of the house,—whereupon Mr. William White was very near letting his coffee-cup fall to the ground.

"Surely the carriage cannot have returned with Janet already?" said Mrs. Mathews, addressing the priest.

"Certainly not," he replied,—"for I heard it drive from the stable-yard about ten minutes ago."

But in the next moment all conjecture was ended, by Sir Herbert Otterborne entering the room.

"Where is Janet!—Nothing is the matter, is there?" said Mrs. Mathews, looking terrified.

But the smiling countenance of her visitor reassured her, even before he could reply.

"Janet!" he exclaimed; "you don't suppose that I trot about the country by moonlight with Janet, do you? No! I have done nothing that should prevent your indulging me with a cup of your excellent coffee. The fact is, that Janet, and my mother, and Dame Morris too, I believe, had got deeply engaged in a discussion upon the best mode of setting flies and moths, and such small deer, at defiance; and as the moon was shining gloriously through the window, I thought I would leave them at peace, and come and torment you a little."

Having said this with an air of very playful gaiety, he shook hands with Mr. Mathews and the priest, bowed slightly to

Stephen, and sat down without appearing to have seen Mr. William White at all.

Nevertheless, Mr. Cuthbridge very soon perceived that it was not his young friend's intention to leave the room without seeing him; for preserving his air of gay vivacity, he seated himself upon a footstool, for the purpose, as he said, of comparing Janet's worsted-work, which was stretched upon a large frame, with that of his mother, who had been declaring that she got on a great deal more rapidly with hers.

With this footstool, which he continued to push about with great facility, he contrived so to place himself as to obtain a very distinct view of the features of the stranger, without its being very easy for this mysterious personage to perceive that he was looking at him at all.

This lasted for a minute or two; and then Sir Herbert sprung up, received his cup of coffee standing, and addressed two or three neighbourly bits of gossip to poor Mr. Mathews, who, though looking kindly at him, as if comforted by seeing him there, seemed too nervous to understand very clearly what he said, or to be at all able to answer him.

Mrs. Mathews and Mr. Cuthbridge meanwhile continued to converse about nothing; while, with every appearance of suffering from the awkwardness of their position, Mr. William White and his friend Stephen did not converse at all.

Had Stephen Cornington's recent conduct to Mrs. Mathews been a little less pronounced in the insolence of its tone, a feeling of common civility would have led her to address some trifling word either to him or his friend; but the terms they had been upon since the death of her father had gradually led to such a degree of estrangement as to make it no easy matter for her now to speak to him at all.

But this very disagreeable state of things did not continue long; for the welcome sound of the carriage-wheels upon the gravel, announcing the return of Miss Anderson, seemed to bring some species of relief to everybody.

She cast rather an anxious glance towards her adopted mother as she entered; but on seeing Mr. Cuthbridge near her, she looked perfectly satisfied,—and her next emotion was that of astonishment at seeing Sir Herbert arise from his lowly seat upon the footstool, and stand before her.

"You did not expect to see me here, Miss Anderson?" he said, laughing; "but to tell you the honest truth, I got heartily tired of you and my mother, and in order to prevent the dis-

grace to all of us of my falling fast asleep in your presence, I rambled out into the moonlight, and I suppose it was the mere force of habit that brought me here."

The eyes of Janet were fixed upon his face as he said this, and Mrs. Mathews, at least, knew her well enough to be aware, from the expression of her countenance, that the words Sir Herbert had uttered were not true words.

Her only answer to him was a bow, which was the best answer she could make,—for it said nothing. While things were in this attitude, Mr. Cuthbridge, either by accident or design, looked into the face of Mr. White. He instantly withdrew his eyes, and turning suddenly to Sir Herbert Otterborne, he said,—

"Well, my young friend, you have had your frolic, and by your own account have greatly enjoyed your moonlight walk. What say you to having a little more enjoyment of the same kind? Will you walk with me to Proctor Castle? Mrs. Mathews will send Jem across the park to say you are going to sleep there; and I will promise to go back with you in the morning, and breakfast with her ladyship. What say you, Sir Herbert? The distance is nothing for such an active fellow as you are."

This was a proposition as foreign as was well possible to the habits of both gentlemen, for the priest had never in his life invited any guest to sleep at Proctor Castle in the absence of its noble owner; and Sir Herbert Otterborne would decidedly have preferred walking back again from the Castle, if he had walked to it, rather than send such a very strange message to his mother.

But while the priest was uttering this very novel proposal, he fixed his eyes on those of the intelligent young friend he addressed; and there seemed to be no occasion for any further explanation between them, for Herbert replied by just such a nod as he would have given had he proposed any ordinary excursion for the morrow, and replied,—“Willingly, Mr. Cuthbridge!” and they quitted the house together; but not, however, till Sir Herbert had made an opportunity of muttering to Mrs. Mathews, “You need not send Jem. I shall be with you early to-morrow.”

## CHAPTER LX.

THE two friends then walked off arm-in-arm, in the direction they would have taken, had they indeed been intending to proceed together to Proctor Castle ; nor were they very far short of it, when Sir Herbert at length called a halt, and took leave of his companion—but not till it had been settled between them that they were to meet on the morrow at an early breakfast, at the Manor-house. The subject which they discussed during their walk may be easily guessed—and some account of it shall be given hereafter ; but we must first follow Stephen Cornington into his bed-room—to which he was speedily followed by his friend, Mr. White, who remained in his own apartment only long enough to take off his shoes, and put out his candle ; having done which he stepped over the few yards of carpeted passage which divided their rooms, almost as noiselessly as if, instead of being the massive Mr. William White which he has been described, he had been as light as the fleet Camilla herself.

“Is it likely that your old woman may be walking under the window again ?” demanded Stephen’s frowning visitor.

“You may look, if you will,” returned the sulky Stephen. “There is no window opens on this side the house, except the dairy below and the laundry above. You may open the window very safely.”

“Do you think she could have heard us at that time that we were talking, before dinner ?” asked Mr. White.

“No,” replied Stephen ; without adding another word.

His companion looked at him sternly for a moment ; and then said, “I would not advise you to be sulky, Master Stephen. You may take my word for it, that it won’t help you a bit—quite the contrary ; for if you work me into a rage, you will just be the first to suffer for it, trust me for that. By the Heaven that is above us, boy ! I would as soon wring your neck round, as I would that of a chicken that I wanted for my dinner, if I found out that you were not true to me.”

“I daresay you would,” replied Stephen, savagely ; “and when you had done it, you would have done nothing worse by me than you have done already.

“And if I have done you harm, you puppy !” replied Mr.

White, "whose fault is it? Who would ever have guessed, from your boasting letters, that you were hemmed in on all sides by a set of infernal spies, instead of a set of adoring friends?"

"I never said a word about adoring friends," retorted Stephen. "I told you that the old man doted on me—and so he did, till you came and spoiled everything by your bullying ways. I don't much see how he could give better proof of it either, than by leaving me every sixpence that he has in the world, either of his own right or that of his wife either; and he has repeated this to me again, and again, and again! And now, what do you think of my chance, after such a pleasant dinner-party as we had to-day? I tell you that you have done me quite as much harm already as if you had wrung my neck."

"You had better not aggravate me, young man!" muttered the other, between his closed teeth. "I should have thought you might have known me better than to fancy it would be safe to do so—selfish hound that you are! Have I not told you how things stand with me? Have I not told you that I must be a convict on board the Hulks in a week or two, unless I can, by some means or other, obtain the means of getting out of the country? At this moment all I have in the world is THIS!"

And as he spoke, he thrust his hand into the pocket of his pantaloons, and drew forth seven or eight shillings, about as many half-pence, and in the midst, one splendid half-sovereign.

"It is long since luck ran so confoundedly against me," said he; "and I don't know that I was ever so thoroughly cleaned out before; so you had better not try to pull me up, for I am pretty nearly desperate, young Sir, I can tell you."

"And how far from desperate do you think I am?" retorted Stephen. "Do you think I can't see that the hag and her set are plotting to turn me out? And I shan't be the first, and I mayn't be the last, dear, darling grandson that has been disinherited because he was out of sight."

"If you had had the heart of a man, you might have settled all doubts about the inheritance long ago," replied the ruffian. "You are a great reader of newspapers, Master Stephen. Did you never read any of the pretty, interesting stories to be found there about putting troublesome people out of the way, by cooking for them?"

"But very pleasant it would have been for me, after it was

done, to be taken up as the only person who had any interest in such a job, and kept in jail while the *post-mortem* work was going on, and only taken out again to be hanged!" returned Stephen, bitterly.

"You are a boy, and an idiot," rejoined Mr. White, with a sneer. "The blundering old ladies who were wanting to get the burying-money for their deceased husbands, might easily get into trouble with their clumsy arsenic—but I should have thought such an ingenious and clever young gentleman as you are, Stephen, might, by the help of a little reading, have found out something better than that. And what is more, I am of the same opinion still."

"Then you may keep your opinion to yourself," replied Stephen, changing colour; "I will do no such ticklish work either for you, or for myself."

"It would be more your concern than mine," returned his friend; "I never heard that there was any settlement of two thousand a year made upon me, which I should be sure to come into if I would leave off billiards for a week and study chemistry. The affair is yours, not mine; so let it bide till we have better leisure to talk about it."

"Agreed!" returned Stephen, with a growl.

"Now then, let us talk of MY business, if you please. It is easy enough for you to take the thing coolly; you are vastly well off as you are—though your beloved grandfather is an idiot, and your beloved grandmother as vicious a hag as ever stood in the path of a young man. But my condition is somewhat different. If you do not intend to hurry matters for yourself, I really must trouble you to hurry them a little for me. What do you propose doing for me, Master Stephen?"

"What do you expect me to do? What CAN I do?" muttered the perplexed young man—adding to the question a tremendous oath, to give weight to his protestation that he had no power of doing anything.

"Say that again, and by the Heavens above us, I will give myself up to justice! and denounce you for the swindler that you are!" returned his irritated companion, with his clenched fist raised as if his first object were to lay him crippled at his feet.

"You may bully me if you will—for I can't help myself unless I raise the house. I know of old that you can master me. But if you knock me down first, and tread upon me afterwards, it would not make me at all more capable of giving

money to you that I have not got myself," said Stephen, in the most miserable tone imaginable.

"To think that you should be such a milksop!" returned Mr. William White, looking at him with unutterable contempt. "And you really think that the assistance you can render me is by putting your hand in your pocket, and giving me whatever ready cash you may happen to find there? And do you believe, boy, that I would have ventured to make a daylight visit to a gentleman's house for this?"

"What do you come for, then?" said Stephen, fixing his eyes upon him, as if he would rather have read his answer in his face than heard it spoken.

His companion returned his look with one equally earnest; and remained looking at him for a moment without speaking. Then, drawing the chair he sat on forward, so as to bring himself very close to his companion, and exactly in front of him, he placed his huge hands upon his tall knees, and thus replied to him:—

"I will tell you why I came here, Stephen. I will tell the precise reason for making you this visit, without a moment's further delay. We have wasted quite time enough already. I am here solely for the purpose of obtaining money. Your flourishing letters really persuaded us poor innocent West Indians that you were not only declared heir to your devoted grandfather, but that the amiable old gentleman's purse was more at your command than at his own. Under this persuasion I very naturally thought that there could not be a more favourable opportunity for me to visit my native London than the present; but I had many things to do, and many old haunts that I wished to visit, before I announced my arrival to you. Unfortunately a very admirable opportunity, as it appeared to me—in short, a most tempting opportunity occurred, by which it seemed particularly easy for me to realise a large sum of money by merely availing myself of the power which you know I possess of imitating any writing that I see. I never did a job of the sort better in my life. In fact, it was beautifully done—beautifully, though I say it that shou'dn't; there was neither doubt nor difficulty about it for a single moment; the cash was paid—and if it had not been for my confounded itch for play, I might have been off with it to Barbadoes in perfect safety, and have almost bought a plantation! But I have told you already the misfortune that happened to me. I lost it all! all!—every shilling at the gaming-table! And then, as one misfortune is sure to

follow another, I had the satisfaction of knowing the day after I was thus comfortably cleaned out, that the forgery had been discovered, and that the police dogs were let loose. I should have snapped my fingers at them, as I have done before now, if I had had a paltry ten-pound note to help me—for I know every dodge in London, I believe. But *NOTHING* can be done without money. And then, Master Stephen, what do you think was the most natural thing for me to do? To give myself up to the police, or to come down and pay you an affectionate visit at the house of your devoted grandfather? The latter project appeared to me to be the most agreeable—and here I am. But I have not found you in the condition I expected; if I had, I would have just taken all the ready money you could give me, and taken myself off again, leaving your fine friends nothing worse to say of me than that your Barbadoes crony was a tall, stout man, who did not talk much, but who gave nobody any trouble, and had an excellent appetite. But your boastings had deceived me boy—not only as to your not having a farthing of money to give me, but in the article of your being a favourite. I had not been two minutes in the room before I saw that the old hag hated you worse than poison, and that the young one, with all her prettiness, would have done anything she was bid to do—if it had been to throw the poker at your head; and as to the old man, with all his civility, he looked as if he was ready to fall into a fit from terror of what poor I might say or do next. And then, Master Stephen, I should like you to tell me how you interpret the manners of the two gents who have been visiting here to-day. I should give it as my opinion, if you asked me, that everything they did, and everything they said, and everything they looked, was as full of insolence as they could make it; and I should not be the least surprised if they were both lurking round the house at this very moment, just to watch if I might not take it into my head to set fire to it; it is no fault of mine, therefore, Master Stephen, if I have got you into a scrape; it is the consequence of your own false boasting. If you had been really and truly the beloved and admired young gentleman that you pretended to be, your very particular friend would not be looked at in the way they one and all look at me."

Nothing could have proved so strongly the utterly discomfited condition of Stephen as the forbearance with which he listened to this long harangue.

He knew he had lied, he knew he had been a vain boaster,

and therefore he felt completely cowed and subdued under the accusation ; but, at the same time, he felt truly, and he felt strongly, that if the man who now sat staring at him with the eye of a desperate ruffian, had not crossed his path, he might have still been almost all he wished, if not quite all he had boasted to be. His companion read pretty accurately all that was passing in his heart. " You are a nice one," he resumed, tauntingly : " a noble anchor, are you not, for a dismantled bark to swing upon ? But if you won't help me willingly, young gentleman, I will see if I cannot make you help me unwillingly ; for helped I will be, boy, if your young life pays for it."

" Tell me what to do, and I will do it ?" replied the pale boy, trembling with terror, and with a very deep conviction at his heart that his companion was perfectly capable of executing whatever threats his peril and his poverty might lead him to utter.

It was a frightful sort of glance which was now exchanged between them ; desperation and contempt flashing from the eye and curling the features of the elder, and fear, desperate fear, rendering absolutely livid the face of the younger.

" Tell me what to do, and I will do it ?" repeated Stephen, as if to brave a positive command, let it be what it might, in preference to the dark threatenings of the fierce eyes that were fixed on his.

Mr. William White seemed to feel that he had brought his companion to the proper pitch, for he now thrust back his chair a little, and not with an angry, but with cautious movement and changing his attitude and his look from threatening to meditative, he said, after the silence of a few seconds,—

" I will tell you."

And then again he was silent ; but soon added,— " If my present condition could be changed for your present condition, Master Stephen, I should conceive that I had an easy as well as a triumphant game to play. What I should do in that case would be to remove the old gentleman by tolerably slow poison, —not brisk enough to attract the attention of the coroner, nor slow enough to give any opportunity of meddling to the doctor. If you have not blundered about the settlement, as much as you have about the love and admiration you have inspired, the death of the old man would suffice to ensure the inheritance, after the death of the widow ; for after his death, the settlement could not be altered. They wanted to make me a lawyer once ; and

though I could not stand the bore of their books and their parchments, I am up to a thing or two in that line still. This bit of advice, however, is rather more than you deserve, for the welcome you have given me, Master Stephen, has not been particularly affectionate. So now then I come to my own affairs,—and if you don't help me, *then*, you may repent it to the latest day you have to live; and yet that may not be over long either."

"I have told you," muttered the pale Stephen under his breath, "that I am ready to do your bidding; that is, if it is any way possible to do it. No man can say more than that. No man can do what isn't possible."

"And that's quite true, my brave fellow!" returned the other, jeeringly. "But when a man has studied his trade as carefully as I have studied mine, he finds it quite easy to do many things, Master Stephen, that another might call impossible."

"I'll do what you bid me," reiterated the trembling Stephen, looking nervously at him.

"Good!" replied his companion. "Now for it, then. There is no poisoning, no stabbing, no killing of any kind to be done to-night, young gentleman; so there is no reason why you should look so ridiculously pale. The house must be robbed my dear, that's all. Of course you know where your adored grandfather keeps his money?—and also where his not so fondly-beloved wife keeps hers? This money I must have; but I must encumber myself with nothing else,—and with this, be it much, or be it little, I shall take myself off with the least possible delay, leaving it to your ingenuity to account for having had the misfortune of making my acquaintance. Of course, you know, you had considered me as one of the most estimable individuals in existence. And besides, Stephen, our acquaintance has been very slight, you know,—so that upon the whole I think that such a particularly clever fellow as you are, may easily restore yourself to as great a degree of popularity as you were enjoying before my arrival."

Stephen remained perfectly silent.

"Will you be so obliging, young gentleman," resumed his tormentor, "as to enlighten me on the subject of the money drawers?"

"It is not in a drawer," whispered Stephen,—"it is in the writing-desk that stands upon the table in his bed-room."

"And that desk is locked, I presume, my stout-hearted hero?"

"Yes ;" was the pithy answer.

"And where does the adored grandfather keep the key ?" was the next inquiry.

"In his pocket," replied Stephen ; who now literally did tremble both from rage and fear.

"Compose yourself, young man, compose yourself," returned his mocking visitor. "The task I shall assign you in the transaction shall be a very easy one ; and it is lucky for both of us that I can contrive to make it so, for, I grieve to say it ! I very much doubt if your valour is of a quality likely to ensure your self-possession in any difficult enterprise. However, it matters not, upon the present occasion, for all I require of you is, that when you go into your beloved grandfather's room to wish him an affectionate good night, you should take his keys out of his pocket for me. And it is quite time that you should set about this directly. He is, probably, already in bed. If he is asleep, do your errand and return to me instantly. If he is awake, or if you wake him, tell him that you thought you heard him call. You told me, I think, that our damnably proud grandmother sleeps in another room ?"

"But she will hear as plain as if she were in the same !" said Stephen, in a whisper that seemed frightened at the sound itself had made,—for his voice actually failed him altogether when he attempted to add some further observation.

"COWARD !" exclaimed the other, in a tone that almost paralysed Stephen, though it was a whisper too ; but it was a whisper eloquent both of contempt and rage.

"This is no moment for child's play," he resumed. "A convict's mode of existence would soon send me to the other world, and therefore it is a business of life and death to me ; and so it must be looked at, boy, and so it must be gone through with. . . Escape from the job you cannot, for you are in my power. Strive to be a man, you craven, for one short hour, and by that time I shall be off, and you may creep safely to bed, and pray that you may not dream of robbing a beloved grandfather,—for if you do, you will be sure to scream so loud as to wake the whole household ! Now wait for a moment here, while I reconnoitre."

And having said this, poor Stephen's agreeable visitor took off his shoes, opened the door, and stepped cautiously out into the passage.

"Everything is profoundly still," he said, in a low whisper, as he returned to the room. "Now go ! go quietly ; but yet go

fearlessly. Whether the old man sleeps or wakes, you may do your errand without risk of any kind."

This was said in a tone that was neither gibing, nor angry; and the unfortunate youth appeared in some degree to recover his self-possession, for he rose from the chair he had occupied, took his bed-candle, and prepared to leave the room.

"Trust me, Stephen, when I tell you that what you are going to do involves no danger of any kind; only remember, boy, that if you do not perform it, I must,—and then the work may have to be done in a less peaceable manner. I have no intention whatever of hurting the old man—that is to say, if the business can be done without it. Now then, go! I shall wait for your return in the passage." These words were uttered by Mr. William White as his trembling accomplice walked through the door.

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## CHAPTER LXI.

WHILE all this was done and said beneath the umwhile peaceful roof of the Grange, the two plotting gentlemen who had left it together did not immediately separate, although they certainly did not walk off to Proctor Castle.

"What brought you to us so suddenly to-night, Sir Herbert?" said the priest, as soon as they were quite certain of being unwatched and alone.

"I will tell you," replied Sir Herbert; "though I may thereby run the risk of being laughed at by your reverence. I came to the Grange this evening, solely because Miss Anderson had found out a likeness for Mr. Stephen Cornington's gigantic friend; and I felt some curiosity to ascertain whether her eye was a correct one. Do you smell a rat—as the phrase goes?"

"Go on, Sir Herbert; let me beg you to explain yourself," said Mr. Cuthbridge, gravely.

"Is it possible, my dear Sir, that the same idea can have occurred to you as to her?" said Herbert, eagerly.

"I think it very possible," said the priest. "If I guess rightly, she has told you that she thinks this man, calling him,

self William White, is like to the other man that calls himself Stephen Cornington."

"Exactly so," replied Sir Herbert ; adding, with a good deal of interest, "do you agree with her?"

"I do," was the reply ; "and I can guess, too, the inference she draws from it," added Mr. Cuthbridge. "She thinks," he continued, "that this middle-aged gentleman who has now invaded our peaceful shades, is probably the father of the young gentleman who invaded our peaceful shades about ten months ago?"

"Were you a conjurer as well as a priest," returned Sir Herbert, "you could not have divined more correctly. Janet is seized with an unreasonably strong conviction, that this handsome illegitimate descendant of our well-beloved, but not very wise neighbour, Mr. Mathews, is an impostor."

"And did Miss Janet tell all that might hang upon such a discovery?" demanded Mr. Cuthbridge.

"No," replied Sir Herbert, "she did not enter upon the subject at all ; but, of course, we all know that if the silly old man could be made aware that this vulgar and most audacious youth was, in truth, no grandson at all, the relief to the family would be great indeed. It would be great to the old man himself, but infinitely greater to our dear Mrs. Mathews and her Janet."

"Yes!" said the priest, with great energy ; "the relief would be great!"

"But, even if these two men really are father and son, and that we could have the great good-fortune of proving it, I do not see how that relieves Mr. Mathews from the misfortune of being the young fellow's grandfather," observed Sir Herbert.

"But, in order to prove this, you must prove also that this huge fellow that we have seen to-day is Mr. Mathews' son," replied Mr. Cuthbridge.

"I don't believe that the huge fellow is Mr. Mathews' son," said Herbert ; "nor do I see why the grandsonship might not arise from the mother of the young man."

"For one very simple reason ; namely, that Mr. Mathews, as he has told me himself, never had but one child,—and that child was a boy," said Mr. Cuthbridge.

"Nay, then, this question of resemblance does, indeed, become interesting," said Sir Herbert, gravely ; "for if Miss Anderson be right—if, indeed, the grandson be an impostor—the arrival of his father here may have as nefarious an object as the

imposition of the son. Extortion,—rapi  e! may be the object."

"Assuredly," replied the priest; "with the opinion I have formed of both, it is difficult to say where my suspicions would stop. I have dined with them to-day, Sir Herbert, and one fact became very clearly evident to me; namely, that this visit from the senior is very far from being welcome to the junior. I have seldom seen a young fellow more completely disconcerted than Mr. Stephen appeared at table to-day; he looked ill-at-ease in every way; and if I had believed that there was any reason for his being alarmed, I certainly should have thought him under the influence of fear. But I accounted for his evident embarrassment by thinking that his pride was wounded by having to display so very underbred a personage in the character of his intimate friend. But now, methinks, the feeling displayed was a much deeper one. How do we know at this moment, Herbert, that this precious father and son may not be robbing our dear friends, pistol in hand?"

Without answering this query, which seemed to have been spoken jestingly, Sir Herbert seemed to be revolving rather anxiously the various reasons which there were for thinking that all was not right in the strangely-constituted group which surrounded his Janet at this moment.

"You jest, dear Cuthbridge," he replied, very gravely; "but take my word for it, this is no jesting matter. As to any danger arising from the vulgar young man who has thus far succeeded in persuading poor old Mathews that he is his grandson, and very like him, I do not suspect it, I do not think of it."

"In short, Sir Herbert, you think too well of Mr. Stephen Cornington to believe him capable of anything more atrocious than a vulgar, though very handsome exterior?" said the priest, interrupting him; and then he added, in a tone that had no jesting in it, "I differ from you."

"I know very little about him," returned Sir Herbert; "it is very probable you may know more. I only meant to say, that his position in the family is already so very advantageous a one, that it was not very likely he should use any violent means to improve it. But in fact, it is not of him that I am thinking. If that man who is so decidedly like him in feature be not a ruffian, Cuthbridge, I will give up phrenology for ever."

"I am more inclined to give up Mr. William White than to give up phrenology," replied the priest. "But the very cir-

cumstance you allude to—I mean the excellent position which the young man holds in the family—is pretty well enough to convince us that he is not likely to endanger it for the sake of assisting the other in robbing the house."

"But I see nothing very preposterous in supposing that he may have no very easy means of preventing it," replied Sir Herbert.

"If the likeness which we think we have discovered has anything in it," he continued, after a pause,—"in short, if these men be really father and son, it becomes evident that they are concerned together in a plot, of which money is the object. While ensconced beside the embroidery frame, in order to reconnoitre this resemblance, I examined the face of the young man, as well as that of the older one; and if the features of the latter spake the ruffian, those of the former betrayed a perfect agony of fear."

"What do you suppose he is afraid of?" demanded Mr. Cuthbridge. "Do you think it likely that he should anticipate such observations as we have been making upon him? Do you think he fears that we should suspect this Mr. William White of being his father?"

"He?" replied Sir Herbert; "nothing can be much less likely. Depend upon it, Mr. Stephen Cornington recognises no resemblance between this huge stranger and himself. But it might be that he feared some other danger from his arrival—and something worse too, than merely having to present a vulgar friend. For in the first place, I doubt his being as conscious of this fact as you and I are; and in the second, his unmitigated impertinence to Mrs. Mathews, since the death of her father, renders it very unlikely that he should greatly care whether this stranger annoyed her by his vulgarity or not. But that the young man feared something, I am certain. In short, Cuthbridge, it is *his* fear that has created mine. I do not like the position in which our friends are placed; I do not like the position in which we have left them. I devoted several minutes before we took leave to meditating on the possibility of inventing some excuse for not leaving them; but I could think of none. I expect that you will laugh at me for this, but I would rather stand your ridicule than not enjoy the comfort of hearing myself contradicted."

"I have no such consolation to bestow on you, Sir Herbert," replied Mr. Cuthbridge, meditating for a few moments on what he had said. "On the contrary, I am greatly disposed to agree

with you. Far from having too good an opinion of this young man, my opinion of him is so very bad, so very much worse than it is at all likely yours should be, that I have endeavoured to drive suspicion from me respecting the strange scene we have just left, from the consciousness that I was prejudiced, very strongly prejudiced, against one of the parties. But my prejudices have very certainly not influenced your judgment, inasmuch as till this hour I have never expressed them to any man ; nevertheless your own observation has led you further than my prejudice has led me, for it has induced you not only to conceive, but to express suspicion. And now then, I will confess," continued the priest, suddenly stopping short in his walk, "now then I will confess that I am by no means certain that we are doing right, or acting like the loyal friends to the Grange that we profess ourselves to be, by thus deliberately walking away from it."

"Then to the right about, in Heaven's name !" exclaimed Sir Herbert, suiting the action to the word ; and turning himself round, he began to retrace his steps at a pace considerably more active than when walking in the opposite direction.

"And what do we mean to do, Sir Herbert, when we reach the house ?" said the priest.

"That must be decided by what we may chance to hear, or to see ;" replied his friend.

"But much might be going on within the house," returned Mr. Cuthbridge, "of which we should perhaps know nothing without, till it was too late for our presence to be of any use. Don't you think so ?"

"True, my good friend ! too true !" replied Sir Herbert, despondingly "But is it quite impossible," he added, "that we should ourselves enact the part of housebreakers ? You have known the premises longer than I have done, Cuthbridge ; is there no such point by which we could make good an entrance ?"

"None, that I know of, Sir Herbert," replied the priest. "But I know of a stronghold, that if it could be made to hear a warning word from us, might enable us to make a very secret entry."

"Where ?—and how ?" said Sir Herbert, eagerly.

"Do not circulate any scandal about me," replied Mr. Cuthbridge, stepping stoutly forward, as if inspired by some bright idea which had just occurred to him ; "but I know exactly where Sally Spicer is lodged, because I have assisted in times

past, and before Miss Janet filled the head of my old friend with other thoughts, at many a consultation had and holden in the said Sally Spicer's room, as to the possibility of adding the whole, or any part of it, to the rambling library up stairs, that my whimsical old friend calls her 'Den.' You know this den as well as I do, Sir Herbert; and therefore you must be aware that if Sally's room could be added to it, the said room must, of necessity, be at the top of the house. By what possible means, therefore, can we make her hear us?"

"Do you know of any part of the premises where there would be any chance of finding a ladder?" demanded the anxious Sir Herbert.

"No, truly; I know very little about the premises, considering the number of years that I have been in habits of familiar intimacy with the family. But let us go on, and trust to fortune."

"So be it!" was the almost solemn reply of Sir Herbert; and as it seemed evident that no further consultation could avail them, they strode on together in perfect silence, as by common consent, and at a pace which, though they had walked to a considerable distance before they had turned to retrace their steps, brought them back to the house they had left a few minutes after the conversation between Stephen and his West Indian friend, which was given in the last chapter, had reached the point at which we left it.

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## CHAPTER LXII.

ON reaching the house, Mr. Cuthbridge's first manœuvre was to open a well-known door which led into the stable-yard; for upon this stable-yard the window of Sally Spicer opened.

A very fortunate accident favoured their design, though it was one generally very much the reverse to gentry prowling round a lone country mansion, in the hope of surreptitiously obtaining an entrance. In short, the old stable-yard dog began barking furiously.

"He is securely chained," said the priest, "so we have nothing to fear from him; and if old Sally be the faithful

guardian I take her to be, she will be at her window in a moment to find out why he barks."

And he had scarcely pronounced the words when a window high above their heads opened, and the voice of the faithful Sally was heard to demand—"Who's there?"

"No one that wants to harm you, Sally Spicer!" replied the priest aloud. "Sir Herbert Otterborne is with me, and he has hurt his foot. Come down, and let us in, but move quietly, that you may not alarm the family."

"In one minute, Sir!" was the reply to their summons, and without the unnecessary delay of a moment the back door, close to which the intruders stood, was opened, and Sally Spicer, with a lighted candle in her hand, ushered them into the servants' hall.

"Can Sir Herbert manage to get up stairs?" said Sally, compassionately. "There is a little room nicely ready that I put in order for that big fellow as come yesterday, only Master Stephen said it was not grand enough for him. But it is a capital good bed, Mr. Cuthbridge, if you think he could get to it."

"Now, Sally Spicer, you must show yourself to be a woman of good sense, and not get frightened at what I am going to say to you. For Sir Herbert and I have come here on purpose to prevent your being frightened. Sir Herbert has not really hurt his foot, Sally; we said that to make you let us in without delay. But the truth is, Sally Spicer, that we wanted to get into the house without disturbing anybody."

Sally Spicer was rather a quick-witted personage, but nevertheless she now looked very much puzzled indeed.

"I am sure, Sir, there is nobody as would think the letting you in a disturbance, nor Sir Herbert either. Will you please to let me speak to my mistress, and tell her you are here?"

"No, Sally, no! You must do no such thing; and you must promise into the bargain, not to be alarmed at what we are going to say to you. Here we are, both of us, you see, with a good walking-stick to defend you, so you must not pay us such a bad compliment as to be afraid."

"Afraid of what, Sir?" said Sally, very innocently. "If you ain't neither of you hurt, gentlemen, there can't be anything to be afraid of in seeing you here. Only I am sure that my mistress would like to know if you want anything."

"We only want to be certain, Sally," said Sir Herbert, smiling so placidly, as greatly to restore her spirits, "we only

want to be quite sure, my good friend, that there is no one else in the house who wants anything, and who might be inclined to take it without asking your mistress's leave. Mr. Cuthbridge and I, Sally, don't quite like the appearance of the tall gentleman you have got here."

It was quite impossible that any other words he could have uttered should so completely have roused all the sympathy of Sally Spicer as these.

"Like him, Sir Herbert!" she exclaimed, with a degree of energy which caused both her companions to cry "Hush!" But this caution, though it lowered her voice to a whisper, could not prevent her adding, "If you have found him out to be the ruffian I am sure he is, we may all of us owe our lives to you!"

And then she proceeded, but in a very cautious tone, and while leading these midnight visitors on tip-toe across the hall, to state more than one fact calculated to prove that he was "no gentleman."

And then she narrated what was more immediately to the purpose, namely, that he and the impudent young fellow who invited him, had, to her certain knowledge, been shut up together in Mr. Stephen's room, long and long after everybody else in the house was gone to bed.

"And they have been quarrelling, too," she added; "I knew that from the sound of their voices, though I dared not, for the life of me, stand near the door to listen."

"And do you suppose they are talking together still?" demanded Mr. Cuthbridge.

"That's more than I can say, Sir," she replied. "I stopped at the door, after Miss Janet, and mistress, and everybody was gone to bed, for a minute or so, and then it was that I got sure they were quarrelling. But if my life had depended upon it, I don't think I could have stayed any longer, for the thoughts of their opening the door and coming out upon me, made me feel ready to drop—me being up in the house all alone so! and therefore I took off my shoes, and crept up stairs for all the world like a thief. But I did not get into my bed; I only bolted my door, and laid down upon it, and that's why I heard the dog so soon, and a blessing it was I did, or you two gentlemen might never have been able to get in."

"And now we are in, Sally," said Mr. Cuthbridge, "it would be as well to think a little what we had better do next. Though we are all perfectly agreed upon the fact that this tall

fellow is not a gentleman, and can have no good right to be a visitor in your master's house, we know nothing of him as yet, I believe, that may justify our turning him out of it. Nevertheless, I do not think that either Sir Herbert Otterborne or myself shall choose to leave the house to-night. To-morrow we can talk the matter over with Mr. Mathews; and I daresay we shall make him feel, as we do, that he is no proper guest for Mrs. Mathews to entertain, let him be as intimate as he may with Mr. Stephen. So now, Sally Spicer, you go to bed with a safe conscience. Sir Herbert and I will tuck ourselves up on these two sofas; but we will leave the door open; and be very sure that if any mischief is going on we shall hear it."

This conversation passed in the drawing-room, the door of which Sally had gently shut as they entered it. The room occupied by Mr. Mathews, and which was the best in the house, having a very good dressing-room attached to it, was immediately over it.

Nothing had been spoken by them since they entered the drawing-room, save in a low whisper; and now Mr. Cuthbridge nodded his head to Sally as a signal of dismissal, and silently pointed towards the door.

Sally, remembering that her master's room was above them, took the hint, and instead of speaking, inquired by signs whether she should light the candles which stood on the table.

The priest nodded affirmatively; but just as she was in the act of doing so, he laid his hand on hers, to stop her, while at the same time he pointed with the other hand to the ceiling, and then, in the perfect silence which surrounded them, they all three distinctly heard the sound of some movement in the room above.

The breath of all seemed suspended, so earnestly did they listen; and if there was any doubt before, there was none now, for most assuredly there was some person moving overhead.

"It may be master himself," said Sally, in a low and cautious whisper.

"Are his shutters closed?" demanded Sir Herbert, in the same tone.

"No," replied Sally; "there is one window always left without shutter or curtains. Master likes to see the first of the light."

"Were it possible to get out without noise," whispered Sir Herbert, "we might ascertain, by looking at that window, whether there was any light in the room."

"Follow me, then," said Sally Spicer, stealing noiselessly out of the room; and making her way through a passage which led to the offices, she led her two companions through the open door by which they had just entered the house, and by a short cut passed out from the stable-yard upon the lawn.

The first glance from thence showed them that there was not only a light in the room of Mr. Mathews, but that there were two men at no great distance from the window.

"Now, then, for the kitchen poker, Sally!" said the priest, striding rapidly back by the way they came; nor were either of his two companions much behind him.

In the article of pokers, Sally Spicer seemed to have a perfect arsenal; but in passing through the kitchen, Mr. Cuthbridge caught sight of a cleaver, of which he possessed himself without a moment's delay, indicating to his friend Sir Herbert, who followed close upon his heels, that he resigned the noble poker which Sally was in the act of presenting, to his use.

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## CHAPTER LXIII.

WE must now return to the unhappy Stephen Cornington, whom we left in the act of passing from his own room into the long passage, which terminated by a door, leading into that of his "adored grandfather."

But though he stepped pretty steadily forward, and without once venturing to look back, it seemed that Mr. William White did not feel sufficient confidence in his valour to trust to it implicitly; for, shoeless, and so lightly, that, considering his weight, it appeared as if he must have studied the art of walking stealthily, his tyrannical companion followed close behind him.

On reaching Mr. Mathews' door, the young man laid his faltering hand upon the lock, and made a not very vigorous attempt to open it

"Idiot!" ejaculated his companion at his ear. "Have you forgotten that the old fool is deaf?"

"Not very," murmured Stephen;—"he is not very deaf.

He is not deaf enough. I am sure he will wake! I know he will!"

These doubting words seemed to try the patience of Mr. William White beyond his power of endurance; for grasping the arm of the young man, as if to prevent his running away, he applied his own powerful hand to the lock, and in the next moment they were both in the room.

The candle, which had been carried by Stephen, was placed upon the table; and this being done, the leader of the exploit held up his finger as a signal that the business was to begin, and uttered the emphatic monosyllable, "Now!"

Though evidently trembling in every limb, as he well might do, from the double terror of being taken up for a thief, and of losing a splendid inheritance into the bargain, the pale and haggard-looking young man seized upon Mr. Mathews' nether garments, which were placed beside his bed on a chair, and thrusting his hand into the pocket, drew forth a small bunch of keys.

It now seemed that Mr. William White intended to perform the rest of the business himself; for he grasped the bunch of keys, which certainly looked as if they were in danger of falling, and holding them up between himself and the candle, pronounced the word, "WHICH?"

In reply to this, the quaking Stephen stretched out a finger, and touched the smallest.

"WHERE?" was now uttered in the same imperative whisper, and again obeyed by the pointing of Stephen to a tolerably massive writing-desk, which stood upon a table between the two windows.

"Now hold the candle for me," said the master-spirit, who, unfortunately, was the master-body, too. "Hold the candle steadily for me, my hero, and I will not detain you long. And then you shall let me out of the back-door. I know where to find the brisk-trotting horse; and then, good-bye, my dear; you won't hear of me again in a hurry!"

While he softly whispered these consolatory words, Stephen held the candle for him with the most unresisting obedience; and, by the aid of it, the practised hand of Mr. William White drew forth from a private drawer a good-sized pocket-book, one single glance at the contents of which proved to him beyond contradiction that his host kept a great deal more ready money in the house than was prudent, considering his defective hearing, and the soundness with which he slept.

But exactly at the moment when this precious pocket-book was in the act of being transferred to the pocket of his own pantaloons, he felt a powerful, though when compared to his own, not exactly a heavy hand, laid upon his shoulder.

The thieving giant swung himself round with equal strength and agility, and perceived the priest, whose hand his quick movement had shaken off, and the taller, though less powerful Sir Herbert Otterborne behind him.

Mr. William White measured them both with his eye in an instant. "If you are a priest," said he, "which from your white choker I suspect you are, you will prove yourself too wise a man to do battle against odds. Just look at him," he continued, pointing at Stephen, "he would bring your companion down by mere weight of metal; and I will leave you to judge for yourself what you would be in my clutches."

Mr. Cuthbridge, though as complete a priestly gentleman as ever was bred at Rome, was, nevertheless, a stout-hearted Irishman, and there was probably more of his native than of his adopted country in the feeling with which he answered this bravado.

"There be many" said he, "who think that the corporeal strength of a priest is bestowed a little after the fashion of Samson's, and that it oozes out when he submits to the tonsure; but do not be too sure, Mr. William White, that such has been the case with me. I do not wish to delude you, however, into fancying I am unarmed. See this!" he added, suddenly raising his right arm which he had suffered to hang beside him, "this cleaver, Sir, will do your business very rapidly if you do not instantly lay down upon that table the pocket-book you have stolen. Do you hear me! Lay down the pocket-book, and be off."

"I have a trick worth two of that," returned Mr. William White,—thrusting his hand into his bosom, and drawing thence a pistol; "I want this money, Sir, and will have it," he said, deliberately taking aim at the head of the priest, who stood exactly before him at the distance of about four feet. "Beyond this," continued the ruffian, "I have no evil intentions towards any of ye. Consult your own safety, Sir, and get out of my way."

But ere he had well pronounced the last word, he found that he had another adversary to deal with; for Sir Herbert Otterborne, who was standing on his right hand, but a little behind

him, threw himself suddenly upon him, and wrenched the pistol from his hand.

The startled robber stood for a moment aghast, as if doubtful from what quarter this attack upon him had come ; and as he looked around him, his eye encountered that of Stephen Cornington,—who might have stood at that moment, notwithstanding all his manly comeliness, as a model of craven terror and dismay.

“And there you stand, accursed coward !” roared the disarmed ruffian ; “and this is the way you hope to get quit of me, and escape discovery, is it ?”

Either these words, which were uttered in a stentorian voice, or the sound of the pistol which Sir Herbert had prudently discharged from the window, had conquered both the sleep and the deafness of poor Mr. Mathews, who now wide awake, but conscious only that his room seemed full of people making a great noise, raised himself in his bed, and chancing to fix his eye upon his beloved grandson, exclaimed in a piteous voice, “Come to me, Stephen ! come to me !”

Sally Spicer, meanwhile, having stayed in the room long enough to see the pistol safely discharged through the window, proved her faithful affection to her mistress by hastening to her room,—for seeing the big man disarmed, and his ally, Stephen, so comfortably terrified, she began to feel more interest in what was going on than fear for the result of it ; but Mrs. Mathews and Janet, who had agreed to pass the night together in the room of the former, for the sake of talking over the strangeness of having such a guest as Mr. William White,—had already been disturbed by the various noises which had been startling the dull ear of that eventful night, and now met her in the passage. Without pausing for any explanation, the three females entered the bed-room of Mr. Mathews together.

It boots not to tell the astonishment felt by the two ladies on beholding the party assembled there ; but startling as was the unexpected appearance of Sir Herbert Otterborne and Mr. Cuthbridge, it removed all or very nearly all, the terror which the scene they now witnessed might otherwise have inspired.

Stephen at the moment they entered had rushed to the bed, in obedience to the cry of the frightened and bewildered old gentleman, and as he threw his arms about him, assuring him that he would willingly sacrifice his own life for the protection of his “adored grandfather,” the fond youth flattered himself

that his bright prospects for the future were still unchanged, and that Mr. William White being disarmed, he had no longer anything to fear from him. For it was evident that the law must now take its course, and that his dear friend, if not hanged, would at any rate be transported as a convict for the term of his natural life, which would effectually prevent his having any more trouble from him.

But in reasoning this, the hope that was father to the thought very cruelly deceived him.

Mr. William White,—notwithstanding the awkward position in which he found himself standing, with Mr. Cuthbridge on one side, Sir Herbert on the other, and the three females joined by the now awakened footman, around him,—retained quite enough self-possession to hear the sugared words with which Stephen was endeavouring to soothe the terrors of his beloved progenitor; whereupon he very majestically addressed his audience in these words :

“Don’t be afraid of me, good people! Even if his reverence had left me in possession of the pistol, I had no intention of shooting any of ye,—for I vastly prefer being transported to being hanged. You may save yourselves all trouble on my account; for, as the beloved Stephen can tell you, I have committed a forgery, which has been fully traced to me, and it will be only necessary to mention where I am, in order for the proper authorities to save you all further trouble about me. I have nothing to reproach myself with; for I made a very well-planned and spirited attempt to get out of the scrape—and it would have succeeded too, it would have succeeded perfectly, if that degenerate craven had stood by me. But I have not done with you yet, young gentleman;—leave hugging your adored grandfather, and come to me.”

“He shall not come near you!” cried Mr. Mathews, lustily. “You have done him mischief enough already; but it is clear that he has saved my life now, and all my good friends here will give him credit for it, and esteem him accordingly.”

“He has not saved your life, old gentleman, because it has never been in danger,” replied Mr. William White, composedly; “but most certainly he has saved your pocket-book, and you may reward him for it as much as you think proper. Only it will be more for your credit, you know, if what you bestow upon him is on the ground of gratitude and generosity, and not of relationship,—for it is quite time that joke should come to an end: the craven fellow does not deserve to profit by it

any longer, nor shall he. You, some of you, saw him hold the candle to me as I took the pocket-book,—and that is quite enough to make him a party—so you may get him transported with me, if you will; and if we should happen to be together, I may in the course of time be able to teach him more than he seems to know at present of the duty of a son.”

“Your son!” cried Mrs. Mathews, almost convulsively grasping the arm of Janet as she spoke; “is Stephen Cornington your son?”

“I am ashamed to own him, old lady,—but truth is truth, and you may depend upon it I shall tell no more lies to pleasure him. Stephen Cornington is my son, and my lawful son too; and my wife is still alive, and will take her oath of it, if you wish it.”

“Are you, then, the son of my husband?” said my heroine, almost gasping.

In reply to this question, Mr. William White drew himself up to his full height, and folding his arms across his ample chest replied, “May I ask you, my good lady, whether you see sufficient resemblance between us to make it probable?”

“Then Stephen is not my grandson?” ejaculated Mr. Mathews, with an eagerness that showed him to be exceedingly anxious for the answer; but whether he wished most for a negative or an affirmative none but himself could know.

Notwithstanding the disagreeable scrape, as he called it, in which Mr. William White found himself, he could not restrain a smile as he replied, with a very profound bow, “No, Mr. Mathews, he is not.”

“And that letter from Mrs. Briot?” said the old man, anxiously.

“That letter from Mrs. Briot was a very proper letter for her to write, my dear Sir. Mrs. Briot is my mother, though you are not my father. Your child, as I have been told, Mr. Mathews, was but a weakly baby, and it died before my mother had been married to my father six months. But she would have done a very foolish thing, Mr. Mathews, if she had told you so. The sum you allowed her assisted her very much in giving *me* a liberal education. Though, at this moment, I am almost inclined to wish she had not spent so much of it in procuring such particularly skilful writing-lessons.

“But the man Martha Cornington married was called Briot, and not White,” said the still half-doubting Mr. Mathews.

“He was so called, Sir: you have made no mistake what-

ever in the name. His name was Etienne Briot,—and my name is Etienne Briot also. But men of the world, my worthy Mr. Mathews, very often find it convenient to have more names than one. And now, gentlemen and ladies, permit me to wish you good night. I have had a good deal of fatigue lately, and am extremely sleepy. I must trouble your hospitality for a night's lodging, Mr. Mathews, and so must Etienne Briot, junior ; but you can lock us up together,—and place us both if you like it, in the hands of the police to-morrow ”

This speech was made by Mr. Etienne Briot, senior, with the utmost civility and composure; and when he had ceased speaking, Mr. Cuthbridge and Sir Herbert Otterborne approached the bed of Mr. Mathews, and, after a few minutes conversation between them, it was settled, that the Messieurs Briot, father and son, should be permitted to remain in their respective rooms until the following morning; when the elder, as he was informed by Sir Herbert, who was a justice of the peace, would be given into the hands of the proper authorities.

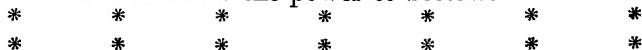
They both retired, accordingly ; and their respective doors were locked upon them. But, notwithstanding this precaution, the two gentlemen, whose return to the house had produced such fortunate results, declared their intention of remaining there till the morning, and a man-servant was dispatched to the Manor-house, across the park, to certify to Lady Otterborne that her absent son was safely lodged at the Grange.

The few hours which intervened before the sun rose on the following day, were very tranquilly passed in sleep by most of the persons whom we have described as having been disturbed during the night. But Mrs. Mathews was not among them. In truth, she never closed her eyes in sleep for one single moment during the hours of that important night. And sorry would she have been had fatigue so conquered happiness as to rob her of the delightful reveries in which these hours were passed.

Excepting to her priest and confessor, as she liked to call him, she had never fully explained to anybody all the misery that had fallen upon her as the result of the ill-advised settlement which she had caused to be made upon her at her marriage.

It was Mr. Cuthbridge only who knew all that she might have done towards making the marriage of Sir Herbert and her Janet a most proper and prudent one, instead of being so widely the contrary, as it now appeared. And delightful indeed were

the hours during which she lay awake, meditating on the happiness which she had now the power to bestow.



The events which followed were such as may be so easily predicted, that any detailed relation of them would be tedious. The only event of any great importance, which the sagacity of the reader may not supply, arose from the professional skill displayed by Mr. Etienne Briot, senior, before the sun rose on the following morning; for when the proper individuals into whose custody he was to be given mounted to the room in which he had been lodged on the preceding night, they found the door still securely closed; but when it was unlocked, it was speedily discovered that the window was open.

And through this window it was presumed that the bulky form of Mr. Etienne Briot had passed, probably by the aid of one of those melo-dramatic ladders which have for ages proved so useful to lovers and thieves.

One other discovery was made respecting him, which certainly proved him to be a very clever fellow. Notwithstanding the overwhelming attack made upon him, at the moment of his seizing upon Mr. Mathews' pocket-book, he had contrived, somehow or other, to keep possession of it—for it was never seen nor heard of afterwards; and as no mention could ever be found in the papers of the forgery-case of which he had avowed himself the hero, there was every reason to believe that he was quite right when he declared to his son that all he wanted to ensure his freedom was MONEY.

As to that handsome young son himself, if he ever met the fate he deserved, it must have been far from the scene of the adventures which we have recounted of him; for the last parental act of his adored grandfather, was to send him off with money sufficient to pay his passage back to Barbadoes—but with the assurance that, if he were ever heard of again in the neighbourhood, he would have to stand his trial as accomplice in the robbery, for the perpetration of which he had been seen by many witnesses to *hold the candle*.

It is hardly necessary to state that the repentant and greatly ashamed Mr. Mathews made a will, by which he bequeathed all his property, and all the right of ultimately disposing of it, to his happy and forgiving wife. But the adventures of that fortunate but very alarming night, affected the poor old gentleman much more severely than it did the bold hero of it; for he fell

into a weak state, both of body and mind after it, from which he never recovered, and which carried him off, under the influence of a rapid dropsy, in rather less than a year after the death of Mr. King.

And, then, where could Sir Herbert Otterborne have found a wife so every way calculated to make a *prudent* match for him as the orphan-daughter of John Anderson?

When the marriage was first arranged, it was agreed amongst the superlatively happy parties concerned, that Mrs. Mathews, having settled the whole of her property, after her death, upon her adopted child, should allow her a thousand a-year from the day of her marriage; and upon being made acquainted with this arrangement, Lady Otterborne's maid-of-all-work immediately opened the windows of the second-best drawing-room and the small dining-room.

But just before the marriage actually took place, and while the affianced lovers and their respective mothers were enjoying a very happy evening together at the Manor-house, Janet suddenly exclaimed, upon hearing that the carriage of Mrs. Mathews was arrived to convey them home—"Oh, mother! how I wish that we were all going to live together always!"

This was not a knavish speech; neither did it sleep in any foolish ear. In less than three days afterwards it was settled among them that they should live altogether always. A "den" was found for Mrs. Mathews; and it must have been a very convenient den, for never did my heroine regret for an instant that she had made the exchange. But she still showed her partiality for a private and separate allowance of five hundred a-year for her whims. Nevertheless, as the "doubtful mortgage," when tested by the lawyers, whom they could now contrive to pay, was declared to be no mortgage at all, the remainder of the Widow Mathews' income sufficed to induce the said maid-of-all-work to open all the other windows of the noble old mansion. Nay, she pronounced, with an air of unanswerable authority, that the venison-dishes and the souptureens were more likely to be in requisition now, without any infringement on the present well-ordered economy of the household, than they had ever been for the last thirty years; which was exactly the period at which that splendid man of fashion, the late Sir Charles, had come into possession of the estate.

THE END.





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